A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS' PRACTICE AS THEY PROGRESS THROUGH TRAINING

Jennifer Secker

Ph.D.

University of Edinburgh

1991

Abstract

This research is based on fifty one interviews with twenty one students drawn from two cohorts who were undertaking a two year postgraduate course leading to the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work. The students were interviewed in depth about their work with one client or client group at key stages of their education and training. The aims of the research were threefold: to ascertain whether different approaches to practice could be described on the basis of the students' accounts of their work, thus making a contribution to the development of evaluative methods in the field of social work education; to explore the influence of training on students' approaches to practice; and to contribute to understanding of the use of theory in social work practice.

The information generated in relation to the first of these three aims derives from the construction of a typology of three approaches to social work practice grounded in the students' accounts of their work. The three approaches have been termed an everyday social approach, a fragmented approach and a fluent approach to reflect their key distinguishing features. In turn, the description of these distinguishing features constitutes a contribution to understanding of the use of theory in social work practice, since they revolve partly around the extent to which the students drew on the type of knowledge which is usually described as theoretical, and partly around the ways in which this type of knowledge was used.

It was beyond the scope of the research to assess the relative effectiveness of the three approaches, and the typology cannot, therefore, be regarded as representing a hierarchy of performance levels. It is, however, a central premise of the thesis that the typology represents a model within which the development of the students' ability to make use of course content in practice can be understood. Three tentative conclusions emerge about the influence of the students' education and training on the development of their practice in this respect. Firstly, although some aspects of academic teaching appear to have played a significant part in the development of the students' practice, the teaching approaches employed may have imposed constraints on the extent to which they were able to make use of course content in practice. Secondly, the practice teaching approaches encountered by the students appear to have been closely associated with the development of their practice. Finally, the research suggests that the learning milieux provided by the students' placement agencies could also have some bearing on the development of their practice.

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that the research it describes is my own work.

.....

Jennifer Secker

September 1991

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have received a great deal of assistance in undertaking the research described here. I am grateful firstly to the twenty one social work students on whose experiences the research is based, not only for the time they committed to the project despite the other pressures they faced, but also for the thoughtfulness of their efforts to explain their experiences to me. If the research has generated useful information it is due in large part to this. I am also very grateful to the supervisors of the research, Professor John Triseliotis and Mrs. Lorraine Waterhouse, for encouraging me to pursue my own ideas and for offering constructive criticism of many earlier drafts of the material presented here. What clarity I have achieved I owe in large measure to their comments.

The practical assistance I have received also requires acknowledgement. The research was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, with the collaboration of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work. The staff at CCETSW's Edinburgh office have been both welcoming and helpful whenever I have needed their assistance. Rosemarie Mencnarowski and Valerie Chuter typed earlier drafts of the material presented here, and I am grateful for their persistence with my handwriting. The availability of word processing facilities has meant that I have been able to rework the drafts they typed, and any typographical errors are therefore mine. Thanks are also due to Rob Pooley for his help with the pie charts which appear on page 70 and for his patience with my unfamiliarity with the Apple Mac.

There are many other people who have contributed less directly but no less essentially to the research. They include my family in London who have given me much support and encouragement, and my friends, who have sustained my belief in the possibility of arriving at some understanding of others and of being understood in turn. Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Roger, who has seen more than his fair share of the highs and lows involved in undertaking the research. In gratitude for his persistent belief that I could and would achieve what I set out to achieve I have dedicated the thesis to him.

For Roger Leslie Paige

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The objectives of the Ph.D. degree are generally agreed to be twofold: to make a significant contribution to knowledge in or understanding of the field of study, and to enable the student to develop the knowledge and skills required to undertake research in that field. In turn, the aims of this thesis are also twofold: to present an account of the research undertaken and information generated on the basis of which the contribution made to knowledge and understanding can be assessed, and to reveal something of what has been learnt in the process of undertaking the research. Although these aims are not necessarily conflictual, they do raise questions which had to be addressed in constructing the thesis about where emphasis should be placed. With the benefit of hindsight it would have been possible, for example, to construct a thesis within which emphasis was placed on describing the research and its findings, thus displaying the sum of what was learnt about doing research, while revealing little of the trials and errors involved in the learning process. On the other hand it might have been possible, though probably not acceptable, to construct a thesis which revealed so much of the learning processes involved in undertaking the research that the research itself was obscured.

In constructing the thesis I have attempted to achieve a balance between these two extremes. There is, however, perhaps more emphasis here on revealing some of the learning processes involved in undertaking the research than is customary or strictly necessary. The rationale behind this emphasis lies partly in my particular interest in learning processes, an interest which is clearly reflected in the focus of the research described here, but chiefly in the way in which the research developed.

Two facets of the way in which the research developed have implications for the construction of the thesis. The first of these concerns the origin of the research in a proposal submitted by the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at Edinburgh University to the Economic and Social Research Council. This proposal was submitted in 1987 against a background of imminent change in the pattern of education and training for social work which highlighted the lack of any detailed monitoring and evaluation of either current or previous

patterns of training. Since the changes being considered at that time by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work were in part a response to perceived public anxiety about how adequately students are prepared for practice, a central objective of the proposed research was to contribute to the development of methods for the monitoring and evaluation of training programmes.

The implications for the construction of the thesis lie in the fact that the initial problems posed for the researcher, and hence the main direction of learning in the early stages of the project, revolved more around methodological considerations than around defining the precise focus of the research. In the original proposal it was envisaged that the first stage of the project would involve the design of an instrument for the measurement of social work students' performance. Having designed such an instrument, it was intended that the performance of students at key stages of training would be measured, and that the relationship between their performance, their background characteristics and their mode of training would be ascertained. By implication, then, the proposed research strategy involved a pre-test/post-test experimental design and a statistical analysis of multi-variate correlations.

Accordingly, in the early stages of the project the work undertaken consisted largely in exploring the possibilities and problems involved in designing an appropriate performance measure. The conclusion drawn, however, was that the reliabilty and validity of a performance measure for use in this educational field would remain in doubt, and that more might be gained by exploring the possibilities afforded by a qualitative, descriptive research strategy. While it would probably have been acceptable to set aside this early work and the learning which ensued, from my perspective that learning was fundamental to the development of the research described here. For this reason the first chapter of the thesis is perhaps rather unusual, in that the main focus is on what was not done and why, rather than on the research which was eventually undertaken.

The second facet of the development of the research which has some bearing on the way in which the thesis is constructed concerns the qualitative, descriptive nature of the strategy which was adopted. Central to this strategy was a concern to avoid prescribing too definitively what was or was not to be regarded as of interest. While it was obviously necessary to define the scope of

the research, emphasis was placed on discovering and describing what might be of interest within the defined area of study. Hence, it was not possible to clearly demarcate in advance all those areas of literature which eventually became relevant to the research. Rather, it was necessary to obtain an overview of what might be relevant, and on that basis to delineate some broad areas of interest, with a view to examining other areas of literature in more detail as they became relevant.

In obtaining the kind of overview required I was greatly assisted by the opportunity to undertake a separate small research project involving the compilation of a bibliography of British and North American research abstracts relevant to social work education (Secker and Clark, 1990). Within the literature of the other professions, of occupational psychology and of sociology there is also a great deal which became relevant to the research. Although it would eventually have proved possible to draw this literature together I decided not to do, partly because this would, I thought, present both writer and reader with too formidable a task. More importantly, perhaps, to do so would have been to remove the relevant literature from the context in which it made sense to me as the work described here unfolded. For this reason, the literature reviewed in the course of undertaking the research has not been presented in one chapter devoted solely to that purpose. Instead, different areas of literature are reviewed as they become relevent to what is being discussed. The remainder of this introductory discussion will provide an overview of what is included in each chapter.

In Chapter One, as has been seen, the focus of discussion is on the choice of research strategy. The difficulties involved in designing a performance measure for use in this educational field are examined firstly from the perspective of the history of social work education in Britain, and secondly in relation to the problems of reliability and validity entailed. An illustration of these problems is presented through the medium of a review of twelve North American studies in the field of social work education which have employed an experimental design. In Chapter Two the aims of this research are then described with reference to two areas of literature which were influential in shaping those aims. These include the work of a number of researchers in the fields of occupational psychology and nursing studies who have used qualitative, descriptive research methods, and a body of work within the literature of social work education which has examined the relationship between theory and practice in this field.

Chapters Three and Four focus respectively on the development and implementation of the research strategy. In Chapter Three the methodological issues raised by the kind of qualitative, descriptive strategy adopted are discussed in relation to the theoretical perspective from which the research was undertaken, the interview as a research method, and the question of whether a range of methods or sources of information might not have been included in the strategy. The basis of a decision to restrict the research to one method and source of information is discussed, and the resulting strengths and limitations of the strategy are assessed in relation to the aims of the research. In Chapter Four the implementation of the research strategy is then described with reference to the course chosen as the focus of the study, the students who took part in the research and the timetabling of the study, the design of the interview schedule, and the analysis of the material generated. Here some further strengths and limitations of the research are considered in relation to the generalisablity and validity of the findings.

The aim of Chapter Five is to provide a bridge between the information presented in the preceding chapters and the presentation of a typology of three approaches to social work practice which might be described as the heart of the thesis. The terminology used in describing the three approaches to practice is discussed first. The distribution of the three approaches accross the different stages of training at which the students were interviewed is then described in order to set the material presented in the following chapters in its educational context. Also discussed in this chapter are the meaning of the typology of approaches, some topics covered in the research interviews which have been set aside in the following chapters, either temporarily or altogether, and the way in which material has been extracted from the research interviews to illustrate the typology.

Having presented this background information, each of the three approaches to practice identified in the course of the research are then described in turn in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. In order to facilitate a comparison of the three approaches each chapter follows broadly the same outline. An overview of the approach under consideration is presented first, with particular reference to the knowledge on which the students drew in the context of that approach. The approach in question is then described in more detail from the perspective of the ways in which the students went about obtaining and interpreting information. Finally their approaches to helping the people with whom they

worked are examined. Where relevant, reference is made to the different areas of literature which informed the analysis of this material.

A central premise of the thesis is that the typology of approaches to practice described in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight represents a model within which the development of the students' practice as they progressed through training can be understood. Accordingly, having described the three approaches, the focus of the thesis shifts to the part played by the students' education and training in the development of their practice. Prior to presenting the relevant information, however, some preliminary questions are addressed in Chapter Nine. These concern the extent to which the development of the third approach in the typology can be regarded as a desirable educational objective, and the extent to which the students own background characteristics might have played a part in the development of their practice. In addressing these questions the findings of previous researchers who have sought to obtain clients' perspectives on social work are examined, as are the findings of a number of North American studies which have sought to discover the extent to which students' background characteristics predict success in training.

Having addressed these preliminary questions, the influence of the students' education and training on the development of their practice is considered in Chapters Ten and Eleven. In Chapter Ten discussion of the part played in the development of the students' practice by academic teaching is prefaced by a review of four studies which have sought students' perspectives on training and augmented with reference to the work of other writers and researchers who have addressed the ways in which students learn. In Chapter Eleven discussion of the part played by the students' placement experiences is preceded by a review of four studies which have sought students' perspectives on practice teaching.

Following the presentation of the research findings in Chapters Six to Eleven, in the concluding chapter of the thesis the focus shifts back to the aims delineated in Chapter Two. Here the information generated by the research is assessed in relation to the questions it was hoped to address, and areas which might be addressed by future research are identified.

Before moving on to the main body of the thesis, two further issues require some discussion here. The first concerns some parallels between the learning processes involved in undertaking this research and those in which the

students who took part in the research were themselves engaged as they progressed through training. Although these parallels will perhaps be obvious to the reader, I have chosen not to highlight them because to do so seemed to be to run the risk of obscuring the students' own experiences.

The second issue concerns the implications of the constant change and development which has been a feature of social work education and training over the past few years. As was noted earlier, when this research was first proposed the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work was planning major changes in the pattern of training. Although plans to replace the two existing qualifications in social work and social service with a single qualification obtained after three rather than two years training were eventually rejected by central government, the intervening four years have nevertheless been a time of rapid change. The implementation of an alternative strategy also involving the development of a new single qualification is now well advanced. In addition the implementation of plans to accredit practice teachers and approve placement agencies are also well under way, while further moves towards the development of post qualifying and advanced training in social work have been initiated. As a result, some of the training needs identified in the course of this research on the basis of the experiences of students who entered training three or four years ago may now be being addressed.

Even setting aside these developments in national training policy, however, the course which is the focus of this study has not stood still. On the contrary, a rather different curriculum leading to a different academic qualification has been developed, while less visible changes may also have taken place as both academic and practice teaching approaches have developed in the natural way of things. For this reason the course depicted here may bear little resemblance to its present day counterpart.

Chapter 1
THE CHOICE OF RESEARCH STRATEGY

Introduction

As has been seen in the preface to the thesis, it was originally envisaged that the first stage of this research would involve the design of an instrument to measure social work students' performance which it was intended would be employed in a pre-test/post-test experimental design. An examination of the literature relating to educational evaluation indicates that this type of strategy represents a long established approach. A similar strategy is advocated, for example, by Tyler (1944). Tyler argues that the achievement of educational objectives necessarily involves a change in students' behaviour. Evaluation, he proposes, can therefore be defined as a process for determining the extent to which the desired changes are taking place. Accordingly, he continues, evaluation involves three stages: the definition of educational objectives; the design of a measurement instrument based on those objectives; and the appraisal of students' performance in terms of that instrument at strategic points of the educational experience.

Other writers, however, have highlighted the limitations of the experimental evaluative design, and have argued for greater use of qualitative, descriptive methods. In a widely cited contribution to the literature of educational evaluation Parlett and Hamilton (1972) argue that educational objectives alone do not offer an adequate basis for evaluative research. Such objectives, they point out, often represent only an idealised version of an undertaking which in practice is subject to ongoing interpretation and modification. Under these circumstances, the authors suggest, to restrict an evaluative study to the use of a performance measure based on educational objectives is to impose an artificial, arbitrary boundary on the scope of the evaluation. Parlett and Hamilton go on to argue for the inclusion of qualitative research methods in a broadly based strategy which they term illuminative evaluation.

Patton (1980) frames his argument for the use of qualitative methods in terms of the methodological problems involved in establishing the reliability and

validity of a performance measure. He advises that in educational fields where performance measures have not been carefully designed and thoroughly tested it is more appropriate for the researcher to gather descriptive information about what happens as a result of educational activities, than to use a measure the reliability and validity of which are suspect. In these circumstances, he suggests, more accurate results can be obtained by documenting what students can do and actually have done than by relying on their responses to a standardised test.

In the course of developing the present research it became apparent that social work education is a field in which educational objectives are peculiarly open to interpretation. In turn, in this field the design of a valid, reliable performance measure is particularly problematic. For this reason it was decided not to adopt the experimental research strategy originally envisaged, and to explore instead the possibilities afforded by a qualitative, descriptive approach. It is the aim of this chapter to explore the rationale behind that decision in more detail. The first section of the chapter will examine the difficulties involved in establishing educational objectives in this field from the perspective of an overview of the history of social work education and training in Britain. In the second section the implications for the design of a performance measure will be considered from the perspective of the methodological problems involved in establishing the reliability and validity of such a measure. An illustration of these problems will be presented by reviewing twelve North American studies which have sought to evaluate one aspect of social work training using an experimental design.

1.1. An Overview of The History of Social Work Education In Britain

An examination of the history of social work education in Britain suggests that the design of an instrument to measure social work students' performance presents a daunting task, because in this educational field little consensus exists either about the role and tasks for which students are to be prepared, or about the knowledge required for practice. Since the inception of the first training courses in the late nineteenth century debate, discussion and sometimes argument have focussed around these key areas. Smith (1965) has researched the early development of British social work education and draws on a number of papers of that period to illustrate her historical account. The

extracts and summaries she presents are particularly illuminating.

Smith describes the origin of social work education in a concern to improve the effectiveness of the numerous small voluntary agencies operating in the late nineteenth century. While the work of these agencies was focussed on helping individuals and families suffering the effects of poverty and deprivation, this was by no means universally accepted as the only role for social work. On the contrary, extracts drawn by Smith (p.30) from a paper given in 1900 to a conference of the Charity Organisation Society's Special Committee on Training stress the necessity of a dual role for social work both in helping individuals and in community development. Smith observes, however, that despite continuing support for a community development role the focus of social work remained centred on work with individuals and families. By way of explanation she suggests that the development of psychoanalytic theory in the first half of the twentieth century, and the subsequent espousal of that theory amongst British social workers in the 1940s and 1950s, led to a continuing emphasis on personal and interpersonal functioning. Forder and Kay (1973) offer a second, complimentary explanation. They attribute a continuing emphasis on individual and family work to a belief, prior to the 1960s, that poverty had been largely eradicated in Britain by the post-war reforms of the 1940s. The realisation that this was not the case, they suggest, led to a renewed interest in social and political action which was fuelled by the emergence of a Marxist analysis of the role of social work.

The different historical perspectives offered by these writers draw attention to the development of an ideological schism which has generated considerable argument as to whether the role and purpose of social work does or should primarily concern social care, social control or social change. At one extreme of the debate the kind of problems which receive the attention of social workers are viewed as arising from individual or interpersonal dysfunction. At the other extreme their origin is perceived to stem from an unequal societal distribution of power and resources. From one perspective, then, the role and purpose of social work is considered primarily in relation to the alleviation of personal and interpersonal problems, while from the other such an approach is regarded as little more than a contribution to the persistence of an indefensible status quo. Aspects of this lack of consensus are apparent in the Report of the Working Party on the Roles and Tasks of Social Workers (NISW, 1982). While the majority of members of the working party recommended a move towards

community social work (p.198), Professor R. A. Pinker wrote:

> I am not able to sign the Report of the Working Party on the Roles and Tasks of Social Workers ... Our present model of so-called client-centred work is basically sound, but in need of a better defined and less ambitious mandate. (p.237)

The uncertainty evident here about the role and purpose of social work has been compounded both by a rapid expansion in the boundaries of the profession, and by a concomitant move away from the provision of specialist services towards the establishment of generic departments of social work or social service. Forder and Kay describe the origin of this expansion in a series of legislative measures, beginning with the Poor Law Amendment Acts of 1934 and culminating in the reorganisation of local authority services into generic departments in the early 1970s. Each reform, they suggest, served to develop the role of the state in making provision to meet the needs of its citizens, and in doing so gave impetus to the growth of social work. In her first report, commissioned by the Carnegie Trust in the 1940s, Younghusband (1947, pp.3-4) had already documented something of this expansion. She records eight types of occupation in which social workers might be employed, and notes a growing tendency for practitioners to move into occupations not previously considered to be their domain.

Against this background of expansion and the accompanying move towards genericism, questions about the role and purpose of social work have revolved not only around the extent to which the profession should be involved in community action and development, but also around the service areas within which social workers should operate. In particular, the reorganisation of local authority services in the early 1970s led to concern about the relationship between social work and social service. An illustration of the questions raised is provided by an attempt on the part of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW, 1977) to define the social work task. While acknowledging that some blurring of the boundary is inevitable, BASW argued strongly that social service functions, including the provision of practical and financial aid, must be distinguished from social work. The key distinguishing factor, BASW submits, lies in the application by social workers of personal skills within interpersonal relationships. Others, in contrast, have shared a concern expressed by Hartnoll (1982) about the designation of an untenable boundary between social work and social service.

The developments outlined above have been reflected in the field of social work education in a cycle of training initiatives aimed at meeting the increasing demand generated for qualified practitioners capable of working across a broad spectrum of service provision. In her account of the development of social work education in Britain Younghusband (1978) describes the introduction in the 1960s of a new qualification, the Certificate in Social Work. The new qualification, she notes, was designed both to replace the multiple specialist qualifications then available, and to be accessible to sufficient numbers of people to remedy an acute shortage of workers. This exercise was to be repeated, however, a decade later.

In 1972, alongside the reorganisation of local authority services, the Council for Education and Training in Social Work was established to replace the specialist training councils then in existence. In Paper 20 (CCETSW, 1983) the work undertaken by the Council over the preceding ten years is reviewed. The Council's original remit is described as including the development of training initiatives to meet the needs of the new departments for trained staff, and a further rationalisation of the qualifications awarded. The first step taken by the Council, in 1972, is identified as the replacment of both the CSW and those specialist qualifications still available with a new qualification, the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work.

In the wake of the reorganisation of local authority services, however, demand grew for training for staff employed by the new departments other than those whose training needs were met by courses leading to the CQSW. In particular, the training needs of the many unqualified staff working in residential and day care services were a focus of concern. In 1975 CCETSW responded by establishing a second qualification to meet this demand. Access to courses leading to this new qualification, the Certificate in Social Service, was to be available on a part time basis to staff who were already in employment and who had no formal entry qualifications. The establishment of this dual training system was instrumental in stimulating debate about the relationship between social work and social service, and that debate was further stimulated by perceptions of the status of the new qualification. Although the CSS was not intended to be a lower status qualification in social work the questions raised and addressed by Barr (1977) on behalf of the Council suggest that it was quickly perceived as such.

At the time of writing the generic local authority departments established in the early 1970s continue to employ social workers in a wide variety of roles and settings. Debate has recently been widened, however, by ideological and political developments in relation to the provision of care in the community. While a wide consensus exists, at least within the field of social work, as to the undesirable nature of large scale institutional care for vulnerable groups of people, moves towards a preferred model of community based care have been slow. In response to disquiet, particularly in relation to the requisite funding mechanisms, the Griffiths Report (HMSO, 1988) has recommended a new role for local authority departments. Rather than acting, as at present, as principle providers of care, the role of these departments is envisaged as one of facilitating and managing the delivery of care by other sectors. It may be that the implementation of these recommendations will result in a return to greater specialisation in service provision for those groups of people whose needs they address. At the time of writing, however, all social work courses are expected to provide education and training which will equip students to work in any area of practice (CCETSW, 1989b). Moreover, in response to concerns about the distinction between social work and social service reflected in the dual training system established in the 1970s, CCETSW is again in the process of introducing a new single qualification, the Diploma in Social Work.

The uncertainty associated with the developments outlined above has been accompanied by a related uncertainty about the knowledge required for practice. Inevitably, views about the knowledge and skills required by social workers depend to some extent on the position taken with regard to the role and purpose of the profession, a recent example being afforded by the opinion expressed by Sir Roy Griffiths that the implementation of the recommendations of the working party he chaired will necessitate the acquisition of new skills amongst social workers.[1] In addition, however, debates about the knowledge required for practice revolve around the academic tradition and the particular disciplines on which social work education should draw. Again Smith (1965, pp.17-18) has documented the emergence of these debates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The papers on which she draws indicate that while some early educationalists argued that social work must be viewed

---

[1] In an interview for **Community Care**, 19th May, 1988, p.7

as a primarily artistic undertaking, requiring training which recognised the uniqueness of each individual, others argued the need for a scientific approach based on systems of classification.

In the latter half of the twentieth century this debate about the relative merits of artistic and scientific academic traditions was overshadowed by a well documented expansion in the social sciences, and hence in the subject areas put forward for inclusion in the social work curriculum. The result is recorded by Younghusband (1978, p.50), who describes the difficulties experienced in devising courses which were not superficial or overloaded, and the dilemmas which ensued as to whether it might not be better to concentrate on some essential areas, albeit at the expense of other apparently equally essential content. A more recent description of the dilemmas which confront social work educators suggests that pressure on the curriculum has continued to increase:

> It has proved increasingly difficult to identify what is the core of social work. There is now so much to be contained within the syllabus that we can perhaps no longer continue with an incremental approach that adds on each new theory, specialism or fashion as it comes along, although that is what many courses may find themselves doing. (Haines, 1985, p.124)

The inclusion in the social work curriculum of a wide range of subject areas is sometimes described as an eclectic approach. One critic of this approach, Sheldon (1978), has described the resulting knowledge base as a "knowledge pile". He argues eloquently for "a small injection of positivism" in the form of the application to practice of experimental research techniques designed to improve scientific rigour in the field. Sheldon's critique has, however, prompted something of a return to the debates of an earlier period, since in response to his views both Jordan (1978) and England (1986) have argued equally eloquently that the humanistic or artistic nature of much of social work practice necessitates the recognition of traditions of thought other than the scientific tradition with which positivism is associated.

On the basis of the overview which has been presented here it can be seen that, historically, little consensus has existed either about the role and purpose of social work, or about the knowledge required for practice. As a result the definition of educational objectives has been a matter of some contention. In January 1982, however, the Council for Education and Training in Social Work initiated the review which resulted in the development of the new Diploma in Social Work by issuing to some two hundred organisations an invitation to

comment on aspects of training policy. This initiative marked the beginning of a move away from a focus on course content towards a focus on the definition of agreed educational objectives, expressed in terms of the competencies to be required of qualifying students. After a lengthy process of negotiation, compromise and sometimes painstaking attention to semantics it was claimed some six years later that consensus had been reached as to the competencies required. (CCETSW, 1988). That consensus has now been expressed in the form of a statement of the competencies required for the award of the new Diploma in Social Work (CCETSW, 1989b). Perhaps partly as a result of the difficulties involved in constructing a compromise from amongst such a diversity of opinion, many of the competencies put forward by the Council are, however, only broadly described. This present position has implications for the development of a performance measure. These implications will be considered next from the perspective of the problems of reliability and validity involved.

1.2. Problems of Reliability and Validity

On the basis of the definition offered by Miller and Wilson (1983), reliability can be described as the extent to which a measure would give consistent results if applied to the same people either more than once, or by different raters. The problem, then, is one of achieving a sufficient degree of standardisation. Writing in the context of performance evaluation in the field of occupational psychology, Landy (1985) suggests that standardisation can be achieved by breaking down broadly defined areas of competence into clearly defined constituent parts which are then described in terms of criteria the presence or absence of which can be readily recognised by raters. In addition, he points out, the reliability of the criteria thus developed depends on ascertaining their consistency across the different situations encountered within a particular occupation.

In the field of social work education the steps advocated by Landy present considerable problems which are not resolved by the consensus reached about the competencies required of qualifying students because, as was noted above, many of those competencies are described only in broad terms. In order to be of use in the design of a performance measure the agreed competencies would require to be broken down and described in terms of criteria by which they might be recognised. While this might be a relatively straightforward task

as far as some of the more concrete competencies put forward by CCETSW are concerned, others seem unlikely to be susceptible to such treatment. The following "catch-all" clause which prefaces the list of core skills required for the award of the Diploma in Social Work highlights the problems involved:

> Skills will also need to be selected and combined appropriately in relation to the task being undertaken, to the needs and wishes of the participants, to the availability of other demands and resources, to the setting and circumstances, and to the numbers of people involved. (CCETSW, 1989b, p.16)

From this brief extract alone it is apparent that the recognition of the skills listed by the Council depends on complex judgements about what is appropriate in a remarkably wide range of circumstances. Hence the problems involved in describing criteria by which those skills might be recognised by different raters across the varied contexts of social work practice present a considerable obstacle. This was in part why the development of an instrument to measure students' performance in this educational field was described at the beginning of this chapter as a daunting task. Just how daunting is illustrated by Cummins (1976), who cites an attempt to describe criteria of competence in just one area of North American service provision which resulted in over two thousand task statements and related criteria. To fail to take the steps advocated by Landy, however, places the reliability of any performance measure at risk by leaving open to interpretation both what is meant by the specified competencies and how they are to be recognised. These problems of reliability are compounded in the field of social work education by the problems involved in ensuring the validity of a performance measure.

Miller and Wilson define validity as the extent to which an instrument really measures what the researcher set out to measure. Within that broad definition they describe two aspects of validity which are of interest here. On the one hand measures have face validity, they explain, when they contain items which intuitively appear to be valid representations of what the researcher wants to measure. On the other hand they have content validity when they can be demonstrated to sample adequately the domain they are supposed to measure.

Viewed from the perspective afforded by these definitions, the field of social work education poses problems for instrument design which stem from the central purpose of education in this field. Although it may be reasonable, in some fields of education, to measure only the extent to which students have learnt *about* what has been taught, the raison d'etre of social work education is

to prepare students for practice. Hence in this field concern is focussed not only on the content of students' learning, per se, but also on the extent to which they are able to use what they have learnt in practice. If research is to contribute to the development of methods of evaluation in this educational field, a key objective must therefore be to address that question. Under these circumstances it seems insufficient to rely on an intuitive assessment of the extent to which a performance measure is representative of a practice context. In any case, given the breadth and variety of the field, it seems likely that even the face validity of a performance measure would be a matter of some dispute. An illustration is provided by Paley (1984), who notes that an attempt on the part of the School of Social Work at Leicester University to develop a tool for student assessment was criticised by some as too psychoanalytical in perspective, and by others as too behavioural.

Despite these problems, in the United States a considerable number of studies which have relied on the experimental design have been undertaken in the field of social work education (Secker and Clark, 1990). A review of twelve of these studies, all of which aimed to evaluate social work skills training formats, was undertaken in the course of developing the present research. The conclusion reached was that the researchers concerned have been able to overcome the problems of reliability discussed above, but only at the expense of the content validity of the performance measures used. These studies therefore exemplify the problems which confront the design of a performance measure in this educational field, and they will be drawn on here to provide an illustration.

Interest in skills training appears to have burgeoned in the field of social work education during the 1970s in response to a body of North American research in the field of counselling psychology which suggested that focussed training improved students' counselling skills. The most widely cited studies are those undertaken by Carkhuff and Ivey and their colleagues. [2] The skills training formats developed in the the field of social work education in response to this body of research would appear to lend themselves particularly well to experimental evaluation both because they focus on highly specific skills which are described in terms of the behaviours required for their use, and because

---

[2]For example: Truax and Carkhuff (1967); Ivey (1971).

the required behaviours are practised by students in carefully controlled, standardised situations. [3] As a result, the problems of reliability discussed above are relatively easily overcome by using these standardised training situations to operationalise a performance measure. Because they rely on carefully controlled, standardised situations, however, the validity of these training materials as performance measures remains in doubt. Five of the twelve studies reviewed in the course of developing this research provide a particularly clear illustration since in these five cases it was assumed that students' written responses to stimuli such as pre-recorded, simulated social work interviews were an accurate measure of their own skills. (Larsen and Hepworth, 1978; Keefe, 1979; Toseland and Spielberg, 1982; Corcoran, 1982; Hawthorne and Fleisher, 1986). In these cases, then, even the face validity of the measures employed is open to question.

In six of the remaining seven studies, the measures employed were based on students' own performance in role played exercises. (Fischer, 1975; Clubok, 1978; Schinke et al., 1978 & 1980; Shapiro et al., 1980; Larsen and Hepworth, 1982). The content validity of these six studies depends, then, on the extent to which skills developed and demonstrated through the medium of role played simulations are transferred to the field. Only one study, reported by Kopp and Butterfield (1985), appears to have attempted to address this question. Initially, Kopp and Butterfield employed video-taped role plays both as training materials and to operationalise a performance measure in a pre-test/post-test experimental design. In common with all the other researchers whose work has been cited here, they found that students' skill levels improved after training. Unlike other researchers, however, Kopp and Butterfield carried out a further test designed to ascertain whether the skills acquired during training were transferred to the field. This test is of particular interest because on this occasion, despite the problems of reliabiity which they acknowledge, the researchers employed video-taped recordings of students' work with clients to operationalise their performance measure. They found not only that the skills acquired in training did not transfer to the field, but also that a homogeneity of style which developed amongst the student sample during training dissipated in the field. Kopp and Butterfield offer a number of explanations for these findings,

---

[3]Gibson et al. (1981) describe one such format developed in the British context.

including the possibility that work with clients involves complexities which are not reflected in role played situations. What their study demonstrates in addition, however, is that in the field of social work education the design of a standardised, and therefore reliable performance measure places the content validity of that measure in doubt. This conclusion is supported by two previous reviews of a wider range of the North American research than can be encompassed here. Both Bloom (1976), who reviewed fifty studies, and Sowers-Hoag and Thyer (1985), who reviewed a further twenty two studies, conclude that more attention has been paid to the reliability of the performance measures employed than to their validity.

Given that the present research originated in the need to develop evaluative methods in order to address concerns about the extent to which students are prepared for practice, to replicate the approach of these North American researchers seemed insufficient. On the other hand, the problems of reliability involved in designing an instrument of greater content validity appeared to preclude the possibilty of extending the experimental design beyond the boundaries which have confined them. It was in the light of these methodological problems that a decision was taken to explore the possibilities afforded by a qualitative, descriptive research strategy.

Summary

In this chapter the rationale behind the decision to move away from the experimental research design originally envisaged towards a qualitative, descriptive approach to the development of evaluative methods in the field of social work education has been presented. It has been seen that in this field the establishment of agreed educational objectives has, historically, proved elusive as a result of debate and uncertainty both about the role and purpose of social work, and about the knowledge required for practice. While greater consensus than hitherto existed has recently been reached about the competencies required of qualifying students, these competencies remain only broadly described and open to interpretation. Their translation into a reliable performance measure therefore remains problematic. Although these problems of reliability can be overcome in certain carefully controlled situations, as exemplified in the evaluation of skills training formats by North American researchers, the content validity of the measures employed remains in doubt.

The decision to explore the possibilities afforded by a qualitative, descriptive

approach was reinforced and given substance by a review of some further contributions to the literature of social work education and other relevant disciplines. The conclusions drawn in relation to the aims of this research will be the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 2
THE AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

Introduction

In the previous chapter it was seen that a decision was taken not to pursue an approach to the development of methods for the monitoring and evaluation of social work education which entailed the design of a performance measure on the grounds that the methodological problems involved precluded such an approach. Instead it was decided to examine the possibilities afforded by a qualitative, descriptive approach. In considering what might be achieved through this kind of approach an examination of the literature of occupational psychology and nursing studies proved helpful. In both fields, rather than prescribing in advance the knowledge and skills required to accomplish the work in question researchers have employed a technique known as "critical incident technique" to ground descriptions of different levels of performance in the accounts either of observers or of practitioners themselves. Although it was not considered appropriate to directly replicate their approach, the work of these reseachers was influential in shaping the aims of this research in that it suggested the possibility of exploring social work students' approaches to practice at different stages of their education and training through the medium of their own accounts of their work. By doing so it was thought that three main aims might be achieved. Firstly, it was thought that it might be possible to make a contribution to the development of evaluative methods in this educational field by ascertaining whether different approaches to practice could be described on the basis of students' accounts of their work. In turn, if this proved possible it might also be possible to explore the influence of social work education and training on students' approaches to practice. Finally, it was thought that a contribution might be made to understanding of an area which is of particular interest in this educational field, namely the use of theory in practice.

In this chapter the reasoning behind the delineation of these aims will be presented. In the first section of the chapter the work of those researchers in the fields of occupational psychology and nursing studies who have employed

critical incident techniques will be briefly examined in order to draw out the influence of their work on the aims of this research. In the second section a more detailed review of some contributions to the literature of social work education will then be presented in order to clarify the contribution which it was hoped to make to understanding of the use of theory in practice.

2.1. Critical Incident Technique

Flannagan (1954) locates the origin of the critical incident technique in a series of studies undertaken by North American psychologists during the second world war with the aim of developing procedures for the selection and classification of aircrews. The main thrust of the studies he describes was to obtain more specific information about the kinds of behaviours which differentiated effective and ineffective performance of the tasks required of wartime pilots than was contained in the generalised explanations commonly given for failure, such as "unsuitable temperament", or "poor judgement". In order to obtain more specific information, personnel who were in a position to directly observe pilots' actions were asked to describe incidents during which a pilot had acted in ways which were especially helpful or unhelpful in accomplishing a particular task. Behaviours which were observed to have contributed to the accomplishment of a task were termed the "critical requirements" of that task. In this context, Flannagan explains, an "incident" means any observable human activity which is sufficiently complete to permit inferences to be made about the person performing the act. To be "critical", he continues, an incident must occur in a situation where the intention of the worker seems fairly clear to an observer and where its consequences are sufficiently clear to leave little doubt about its effects (p327).

Within the field of nursing studies the kind of techniques described by Flannagan have been closely replicated by Jenson (1960) and more recently by Cunningham (1981). Jenson's study aimed to explore the potential of critical incident techniques for describing the requirements of effective nursing. Twenty one supervisors, senior nurses and staff nurses were asked to record information about the behaviour of a nurse whom they believed to be especially ineffective and to repeat the excercise in relation to a nurse whom they believed to be especially effective. On the basis of his analysis of this information Jenson compiled a classification of the critical requirements of

nursing which include personal, professional and social skills. Similarily, Cunningham asked a group of ward sisters and charge nurses to observe the behaviour of staff nurses in their wards and to classify the behaviour observed as effective or ineffective. Cunningham went on to use the information obtained to relate changes in nurses' performance to changes in their workload.

These studies, then, have in common with those described by Flannagan a reliance on observations of behaviour for the generation of information about the critical requirements of the work under consideration. As a result, their emphasis has been on the description of observable interpersonal and technical skills, while the less observable cognitive background against which those skills are deployed is left out of focus. In the fields of both occupational psychology and nursing studies, however, critical incident techniques have been adapted to describe cognitive as well as behavioural and interpersonal skills. In both fields this has involved the prior nomination of expert practitioners by managers, peers and consumers. These nominated experts are asked to provide detailed accounts of their approach to a particular piece of work. Their accounts are then compared with those of other practitioners not nominated as experts in order to describe those features which distinguish the work of experts.

In the field of occupational psychology this strategy has been termed "job competency assessment". Klemp and McClelland (1986) describe the use of the strategy to identify the characteristics of intelligent functioning amongst senior managers. Members and clients of the organisation which commissioned the study were asked to identify managers whose work they regarded as exceptional. Both these nominated experts and other managers whose work was regarded as less exceptional were asked to select a piece of work which they considered to be successful and to describe their approach to that piece of work in considerable detail. Transcripts of these interviews were then analysed by "blind" readers who were not aware which accounts were those of the nominated experts. Having first identified themes which appeared to distinguish outstanding performance from more average performance the readers went on to identify thought processes and techniques which indicated the presence of those themes. Klemp and McClelland note that the accounts of the managers who had been nominated as experts were indeed distinguished on this basis from other accounts.

In the field of nursing studies Benner (1984) has employed a similar strategy to

explore the development of expertise in nursing. Benner interviewed 120 senior nurses who had been nominated as experts by their superiors and peers and 120 newly qualified nurses for whose supervision these senior nurses were responsible. Each senior and junior nurse were asked to describe independently their approach to the nursing care of a patient with whom both had worked. Using this material, together with further material generated from interviews with other nurses at a range of levels of seniority, Benner was able to describe five approaches to clinical work, ranging from that of the novice to that of the expert. Some of the distinguishing features she describes will be considered later, since they have some significance for the use of theory in social work practice.

It should be noted that with the exception of Benner, whose approach was informed by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, the researchers whose work has been described above make no mention of the epistemological problems associated with grounding descriptions of different approaches to practice in the accounts of observers or practitioners. The methods employed do, however, raise some problematic issues which had to be addressed in developing the present research. These problems will be discussed in the following chapter. In the meantime, the potential for adapting the critical incident technique for the purposes of this research requires some discussion here.

In considering how the techniques described above might contribute to the development of methods for the monitoring and evaluation of social work education it was thought that an approach with the capacity to explore cognitive processes was required. As will be seen shortly, both the knowledge used by social workers and the ways in which that knowledge is used are areas of considerable concern in the field of social work. The strategies employed by Klemp and McClelland and Benner were therefore of particular interest. For two reasons, however, it was decided that it would be inappropriate simply to replicate the methods employed by these researchers.

In the first place, in comparison with those occupations within which critical incident techniques have been employed, social work is a peculiarly private undertaking. In contrast with nursing, for example, a great deal of social work practice takes place not in a public arena such as a hospital ward, but in the context of private encounters between worker and client. Pithouse (1987), who undertook a study of one local authority child care team, describes social work

as an "invisible trade". He found that the privacy which surrounds social work practice created problems for senior social workers in supervising the work of basic grade staff, and he notes that these problems were compounded by an egalitarian culture within which all qualified workers were deemed to be equally competent. If these findings are generalisable to other agencies and teams, the identification of expert social workers seemed likely to prove both difficult and contentious. Although Harrison (1987) obtained the assistance of staff at the National Institute of Social Work in identifying "excellent" workers for the purposes of a study which will be examined later in this chapter, he does not make it clear on what basis they made their selection. In a field where the nature and purpose of practice are a matter of considerable debate it seems likely, however, that any basis for the selection of experts would be open to dispute, thus replicating some of the problems involved in designing a performance measure for use in this field.

In addition to the problems involved in identifying expert social workers, the approaches described by those researchers who have employed critical incident techniques in other fields are not capable of shedding any light on how students or trainees might be helped to develop the knowledge and skills described. In an educational context, however, the generation of information about the helpfulness or otherwise of the educational activities in which students engage constitutes an important aspect of the evaluative task.

Despite these drawbacks, the idea of grounding descriptions of different approaches to practice in the accounts of practitioners themselves was influential in shaping the aims of this research. In particular, it suggested the possibility of obtaining accounts of practice from social work students as they progress through training in order to ascertain whether different approaches to practice could be described in terms of the knowledge and skills deployed. The intention, then, was to avoid making the prior assumption that practice identified by others as effective or as that of an expert represents, de facto, a high level of performance. Initially, it was intended to consider the question of whether any different approaches to practice identified could be regarded as representing different levels of performance in the light of what information could be obtained about what students were able to achieve by deploying different approaches. As the research strategy was developed, however, it became apparent that this question could not be adequately addressed within the time and resources available. The problems involved and the limitations

imposed on the research will be discussed in the following chapter. Despite these limitations, it was thought that the strategy retained some considerable strengths, particularly in relation to the exploration of students' use of theory in practice. In the event, the exploration of this issue became increasingly central to the research, and the remainder of this chapter will therefore be devoted to an examination of the literature which suggested its significance.

2.2. The Use of Theory in Social Work Practice

As was seen in the preceding chapter, since the 1960s much of the social work curriculum has been derived from a rapidly expanding range of social science subject areas, and problems have arisen as to which of these subjects should be included in the curriculum. A review of the literature of social work education indicates, however, that in recent years debates about what should or should not be included have taken place in the shadow of a growing concern about the limited extent to which social workers appear to use any of the material taught in their subsequent practice. Within the literature this topic of discussion is referred to in terms of the integration of, or relationship between, theory and practice.

Evidence to support the idea that social workers make little use of the knowledge referred to in this context as theory appears at first to have been largely impressionistic. An early example is provided by Smith (1965, pp.28-29) who cites a paper given in the late nineteenth century in which practitioners are characterised as having "no time for books and theories". More recently Sheldon (1978) has suggested that two subcultures exist within the field of social work. These he describes as a theoretical subculture based in universities and colleges, and an anti-intellectual practice subculture. Carew (1979) draws attention to the lack of research to substantiate or refute this view when he notes that only one study, published in 1931, had at the time of writing investigated the knowledge used by social workers. His own study, however, is one of five more recent studies which suggest that social workers do indeed make little use of the kind of knowledge referred to as theory. These five studies will be briefly described here in order to lay the groundwork for further discussion of their design and findings.

With the aim of ascertaining whether social workers use theory in practice and if so how, Carew obtained tape recordings of the work of twenty practitioners

who were also interviewed to elicit their views about the use of theory in practice. On the basis of his analysis of the tape recordings, Carew reports that 91% of the verbal responses made by these social workers could not be associated with a theoretical concept. In the course of the follow up interviews only five respondents indicated that they drew on specific theories in their work. Similarily, in the course of a larger scale study of the views of social workers employed in area teams and hospitals Stevenson and Parsloe (DHSS, 1978) found that only one of their respondents was able to describe the systematic use of theory in practice. A third study, undertaken by Waterhouse (1987), aimed to investigate further this apparent "gap" between theory and practice. Waterhouse asked former students of one CQSW course to identify the authors of a number of key texts and to define a number of key concepts. On average her respondents were able to identify 33% of the authors. Their success in identifying the key concepts ranged from 19% to 69%. Waterhouse concludes that her respondents' course had failed to help them learn the material taught.

While the three studies described above have focussed on the content of social workers' knowledge, Corby (1982) states that his study was designed to investigate the use of theory in practice not in relation to specific theories, but in relation to methods of working. To this end he interviewed fourteen social workers employed in a long term team, using a schedule structured in accordance with a problem solving format which he had assumed would be relevant to long term work. His respondents, however, experienced considerable difficulty in describing their work in these terms, and Corby concludes, like other researchers, that they made little use of theory in practice.

The four studies so far outlined here are rather similar in design, in that they have all employed interviews with samples of qualified social workers to investigate the use of theory in practice. As a result, although the researchers concerned draw conclusions about the implications of their findings for social work education, these conclusions remain speculative because they are based on retrospective data. In effect the conclusions drawn would appear to replicate positions within the longstanding debates about the knowledge required for practice which were described in the preceding chapter. It is striking, for example, that while Carew and Corby conclude that the use of theory in practice may not be necessary, both Stevenson and Parsloe and Waterhouse conclude, in contrast, that training courses fail to equip students adequately for

practice.

A further study reported by Barbour (1984) was, however, a longitudinal study which had the capacity to provide more information about the influence of social work education on students' approaches to the use of theory. Using the techniques of participant observation in conjunction with interviewing techniques, Barbour aimed to explore the process of professional socialisation in social work as it was manifested amongst one class of students. She reports that although the ideal of using theory in practice was initially a high priority amongst these students, their efforts towards attaining this goal were hampered by their perspectives on social work practice. While some students, particularly at the beginning of training, thought of practice as a "helping" process, later in training more students began to conceive of it as a process of "healing". Barbour describes the "helping" perspective as similar to a lay perspective, because it implied the possibility of solving all the different problems which might be referred to a social worker. The "healing" perspective, she suggests, involved "the alleviation of suffering by means of the loving and spontaneous administrations of a charismatic personality" (p.559).

According to Barbour, from the perspective of "helping" theoretical material was viewed as a set of directly applicable procedures, akin to recipes, and the students perceived their course to be deficient in providing this kind of knowledge. From the "healing" perspective a greater standing was ascribed to the personal traits of practitioners than to theoretical material, and the need for professional training was consequently held in doubt. As a result, Barbour concludes, the students developed ways of accounting for the relationship between theory and practice which put at risk the standards of the social work profession, since they were not conducive to the development of a cumulative fund of knowledge about possible mistakes or about ways of avoiding such mistakes.

As Paley (1987) points out, Barbour appears to take at face value the accounts offered by the students in whose training she participated and to assume that these accounts were an accurate representation of their approach to the use of theory. In doing so, she does not appear to consider an alternative interpretation suggested by previous studies of professional socialisation, notably the study of medical training undertaken by Becker et al. (1977), that changes in these students' expressed perspectives might reflect a concern on

their part to gain approval in the academic setting by expressing views perceived to concur with those of their teachers. A more recent study of student nurses' perspectives on training undertaken by Melia (1987) supports such an interpretation. Melia found that student nurses learn what kind of behaviour and views are appropriate in the academic and clinical settings in which they work, and "fit in" accordingly. In the case of Barbour's study, then, it seems possible that an increasing tendancy to express a "healing" perspective on the part of the students in whose training she participated could have been encouraged by an emphasis amongst the teachers concerned on a therapeutic approach to practice. Such an approach, although rather unfashionable now, might still have been influential in the late 1970s and early 1980s when Barbour's study was undertaken.

Unsurprisingly, the findings of these five studies have fuelled concern about the use of theory in practice, and a growing body of literature has sought to address what has come to be regarded as a problematic relationship between the two. It will be argued here, however, that the studies described above are themselves not unproblematic. As a result, it will be argued, the apparent "gap" they identify between theory and practice may be no more than a function of their design. The main premise on which this argument will be based is that within the literature of social work education both the meaning attributed to the term theory, and, therefore, the way in which this type of knowledge is expected to be used, have been derived from a positivist tradition which may have little relevance for social work practice.

The argument will be presented in three stages. Firstly, the way in which the term theory is defined within the literature of social work education will be examined. It will be argued that underlying some not inconsiderable confusion the definition commonly employed is one derived from the positivist tradition. Secondly, the studies described above will be re-examined, in order to argue that their design has also been implicitly based on a positivist view of the nature and use of theory. Finally, the findings reported by the researchers concerned will be compared with the work of a number of other writers and researchers which suggests that, far from indicating that social workers do not make use of theory in practice, these studies may, though it is by no means certain, demonstrate precisely that integration of theory and practice which is the focus of the concern they have generated. Having presented this argument, the way in which the problem of arriving at a definition of theory

was addressed for the purposes of this research will be clarified.

A review of those contributions to the literature of social work education which have addressed the relationship between theory and practice suggests that there exists some considerable uncertainty about what the term theory means. As Blyth and Hugman (1982) point out, the term is used in this field to convey an undifferentiated spectrum of meanings ranging from concepts derived from the natural sciences such as a general law or a hypothesis awaiting confirmation, to the more everyday notion of an unrealistic, idealised statement. However, despite this breadth of usage, when writers attempt either to define the term theory more precisely, or to define the type of knowledge on which social work should, ideally, be based a positivist definition emerges. That this is the case can be illustrated by comparing what Sheldon (1978) has to say about theory with the work of other writers.

In contrast with other writers, Sheldon makes explicit his concern to ally social work with positivism. As was seen in Chaper One, he argues that social work requires "a small injection of positivism", in the form of experimental research techniques designed to test the validity of the theories on which social workers draw. In the course of his paper he puts forward a list of criteria, drawn from the work of Karl Popper (1963), by which the worth of a theory should, he argues, be evaluated. The positivist definition of theory which emerges is one of a set of clearly articulated, logically related propositions the validity of which is testable on observable evidence. The following extracts from four further contributions to the literature suggest that there is little difference between this definition and the definitions employed by other writers:

> ... theories consist of sets of concepts related in such a way as to explain particular natural or social phenomena. (Evans, 1976, p.179)

> Unfortunately, much of [social workers'] 'wisdom', or 'theory' remains at the level of assumptive knowledge because it has not been validated or tested. (Curnock and Hardiker, 1979, p.7)

> The task is to try to conceptualise and document [social workers'] assumptions as either practice theories or theories of practice. ... This exercise should increase the store of valid knowledge in social work. (Hardiker and Barker, 1981, p.3)

> For the purposes of this article a theory is defined as a set of related concepts which can be tested systematically to verify (or not verify) their validity. (Reay, 1986, p.50)

Although these writers are less explicit than Sheldon about the positivist basis of their defintions, their emphasis on theory as related sets of concepts and on testing and validation suggest that a positivist definition of theory is prevalent within the field of social work education. Indeed, even Jordan (1978), whose main thrust is a critique of Sheldon's position, unquestioningly agrees with him that it is important for social work to develop precise, testable theories.

Further evidence to support the view that a positivist definition of theory is prevalent within the field of social work can be found in the emergence, alongside the sort definitions so far discussed, of a second way of defining theory in social work which appears to have originated in the work of Evans (1976). Evans proposes that a distinction can be drawn between two types of theory employed by social workers. He terms one type of theory "theories of practice", defined as explicit theories derived directly from the social sciences, and the other "practice theories", defined as a "home made" sort of knowledge implicit in social workers' day to day activities. This terminology seems somewhat confusing, since it juxtaposes two words which are simply reversed to give a different meaning, and in fact Curnock and Hardiker (1979), whose own aim is to develop Evans' work, point out that earlier writers used the term "practice wisdom" to refer to the kind of knowledge embraced by the term "practice theory". To a relative outsider to the field of social work education this substitution of terms seemed rather strange. After all, in everyday life the posession of wisdom is generally highly regarded. In contrast, within the literature of social work education practice wisdom is portrayed as a rather second rate form of knowledge. In their own conclusion Curnock and Hardiker make this clear:

> ...we hope our work has enabled us to understand in some small ways the complex filtering processes in which social workers are engaged as they work with clients. Traditionally this has been referred to as 'practice wisdom', but we think it can make claim to a higher theoretical status than this. (p.172)

Curnock and Hardiker's attempt to catalogue practice wisdom in order to turn it into the kind of concepts which, they assume, represent a more desirable form of knowledge for practice seems to offer a clear indication of a concern to establish a theoretical knowledge base akin to that of the positivist natural sciences.

A re-examination of the five studies described here earlier suggests that the problems they identify in the relationship between theory and practice may

equally well originate in the same implicit use of a positivist definition of theory. Two features of these studies suggest that this may be the case. Firstly, the criterion used by Stevenson and Parsloe, Carew and Waterhouse to determine whether practitioners make use of theory in practice would appear to reflect the positivist tenet that theory should consist in clearly articulated, logically related sets of propositions. Because social workers have been unable to clearly articulate the knowledge on which they draw in the form of discrete, cohesive propositions the source of which can be identified in the relevant literature, the conclusion has been drawn that they make little use at all of theoretical knowledge.

Secondly, the work of both Corby and Barbour would appear to reflect the positivist tenet that the validity of a theoretical proposition must be testable on observable evidence. The problem solving format around which Corby designed his interview schedule consists, for example, in three discrete stages – the assessment of problems, the application of the type of intervention indicated by that assessment, and the evaluation of the results obtained – which might arguably also be described in terms of the selection, testing and validation of theories to explain the problems in question. Equally, Barbour's conclusion that students' ideas about the use of theory in practice were not conducive to the development of a cumulative fund of knowledge about mistakes and how to avoid them appears to carry the implicit assumption that discrete sets of propositions can be tested in practice and their validity confirmed or refuted.

In summary, then, it is arguable that what the five studies which have been reviewed here demonstrate is not that little use is made of theory in practice, but that theory appears not to be used in accordance with the tenets of positivism. A re-examination of the findings of these studies indicates, in fact, that respondents have not said that theory is of no use to them at all. Rather they have given some remarkably similar accounts of its use, to the effect that it provides "a framework" for practice (Carew; Stevenson and Parsloe), is "integrated" with or "assimilated" into practice (Carew; Barbour), and that different theories or aspects of them which seem relevant to a particular situation are "amalgamated" and used as seems appropriate. (Stevenson and Parsloe; Barbour). Arguably, these explanations suggest that theory may be more widely used in practice than has been supposed, and that further exploration of its use and of the implications for social work education is required.

Some support for this conclusion can be found in the work of a number of writers who have rejected the prevalent positivist position and have put forward alternative explanations of the relationship between theory and practice. Although not directly concerned with social work practice, Schon (1983) puts forward a critique of the positivist position which, in its manifestation in the professions, he terms "technical rationality". Skilled practitioners, Schon argues, do not solve problems in the stepwise, assessment followed by intervention fashion commonly prescribed within the professions. Rather they engage in what he terms a "reflective conversation" with the situations they encounter. In the course of such a conversation the situation to hand is framed and reframed in the light of a practitioner's repertoire of possible explanations and solutions. Depending on how satisfying a picture emerges, these explanations and solutions are themselves adapted until a satisfying solution, which is at the same time an explanation, is found. Schon describes this process as "reflection-in-action". When a satisfying solution for a situation is found, he suggests, it is added to the practioner's repertoire of ways of understanding and resolving problematic situations, to be modified and adapted in turn as new situations are encountered. From this perspective, then, skilled practitioners are seen as researchers who develop their own stock of theories through experience.

Within the field of social work education this conceptualisation of the practitioner as a reflective theory builder seems to be gaining some ground. Pilalis (1986), for example, proposes that theory and practice can be redefined in terms of reflective thought and purposeful action. Using these definitions, she goes on to argue that the requirement to integrate theory and practice is paradoxical, since practice, as purposeful action, cannot be devoid of thought, while theory, at any rate in the field of social work practice, cannot be devoid of any reference to action. Theory, Pilalis suggests (p.93), "is both deductive and inductive, the result of an action". Other writers, for example Rein and White (1981), Evans (1987) and Gould (1989), argue that rather than concentrating on imparting knowledge to students, social work educators should focus on enabling them to derive theories from their experiences of practice.

Some of these writers would appear to suggest, like Carew and Corby, that social workers have little need for the kind of knowledge which is commonly described as theoretical. England (1986) believes, however, that this kind of

knowledge can enhance social workers' understanding of the situations they encounter, although in his view it cannot do so in the form of discrete sets of propositions which in themselves purport to offer a complete explanation for human situations. Instead, he suggests, theory constitutes a stock of knowledge to be "plundered and fragmented" (p.35) to inform an essentially intuitive understanding of the diverse situations encountered in practice. In his later work on educating the reflective practitioner Schon (1987) also suggests that experimentation with preconceived rules and ideas may be a necessary stage in the development of skilful practice:

> Perhaps we learn to reflect-in-action by learning first to recognize and apply standard rules, facts and operations; then to reason from general rules to problematic cases in ways characteristic of the profession; and only then to develop and test new forms of understanding and action where familiar categories and ways of thinking fail. (p.40)

There would appear to be some consonance between this view of the relationship between theory and practice and the findings reported by Benner (1984) and Harrison (1987) whose work was briefly discussed here earlier. On the basis of her analysis of the accounts of nursing practice she obtained, Benner concludes that only novice nurses relied on preconceived rules and theories to guide their work. In contrast with the rather laboured, rule following approach which resulted, more experienced nurses relied increasingly on ways of understanding and responding to clinical situations developed through and grounded in their experience as preconceived ideas were challenged and reframed. Benner terms these ways of understanding situations "paradigm cases". Not dissimilarly, Harrison found that when asked about the knowledge on which they drew the twenty five "excellent" social workers who took part in his research indicated that they selectively used knowledge derived from the social sciences, together with other sources of knowledge, to construct conceptual frameworks and ideas about how to practice.

Harrison's study appears to be the only study undertaken in Britain to have explored the knowledge used by social workers without imposing a framework derived from the positivist tradition. In view of the growing interest and concern about the relationship between theory and practice expressed in the literature of social work education it was thought that an exploration of social work students' approaches to practice at different stages of training might contribute further to understanding in this area. In particular, if the kind of knowledge commonly described as theoretical is not used in the form of

discrete sets of propositions but is plundered, assimilated, or used as a framework to guide the generation of new theories grounded in experience, then, it was thought, it might be possible to catch something of the process involved "on the hop" as it were, as students are exposed to this kind of knowledge in the course of their education and training. In turn it might become possible to explore the influence of social work education and training on students' capacity to make use of theory in this way.

Although the ideas which have been discussed above clearly had some considerable influence on the aims of this reseach it should be emphasised at this point that they did not constitute hard and fast opinions about the use of theory in practice. To replace one set of assummptions about the use of theory in practice with another would, it was thought, be unhelpful. Instead, the question of whether and how theory might be used remained an empirical question which it was thought might be addressed in the context of a more broadly based study of social work students' approaches to practice. For this reason it was decided not to attempt to define too precisely what might be meant by the term theory. Instead it was decided to adopt as a working definition a conceptualisation of theory simply as a way of explaining or making sense of the kind of situations encountered in social work practice, with the aim, if it proved possible, of deriving some more precise definitions from students' accounts of their work. Within this broad definition, however, the kind of explanations for situations encountered in practice which are taught to social work students were of particular interest, given the educational context of the research.

Summary

In this chapter the aims which it was hoped might be fulfilled by taking a qualitative, descriptive approach to the development of methods for the monitoring and evaluation of social work education have been outlined with reference to some contributions to the literature of social work education and other relevant disciplines. It has been seen that a decision was taken to develop a research strategy based broadly on the critical incident technique developed in the field of occupational psychology, with the aim of grounding descriptions of different approaches to practice in the accounts social work students give of their work as they progress through training.

By exploring and describing students' approaches to practice at different stages

of their education and training it was hoped in addition to contribute to understanding of the ways in which theory is used in social work practice. In the light of a review of those contributions to the literature of social work education which have addressed the relationship between theory and practice it was decided to set aside prior assumptions about the nature and use of theory. Instead, it was decided to explore the ways in which students explain or make sense of the situations they encounter in practice, and to examine in that context the part played by the kind of explanations which are commonly described as theoretical. By this means it was hoped to be able to arrive at some more precise defintions of the knowledge on which students draw.

In the final chapter of this thesis the aims which have been outlined here will be re-examined in the light of the information obtained in order to assess the extent to which they were met. In the meantime it is necessary to turn next to the methodological problems which had to be addressed as the research strategy outlined here was developed.

Chapter 3
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH STRATEGY

Introduction

It was seen in the previous chapter that a group of studies undertaken in the fields of occupational psychology and nursing studies were influential in shaping the aims of this research, in that they suggested the possibility of grounding descriptions of different approaches to social work practice in students' accounts of their work. Equally, a review of those contributions to the literature of social work education which have addressed the relationship between theory and practice suggested that a more detailed exploration of students' accounts of the knowledge on which they draw than has hitherto been undertaken might be illuminating. In this sense, then, it was something of a foregone conclusion, arrived at on the basis of the experience of previous researchers, that research interviews with social work students would constitute the method used to achieve the aims described in the previous chapter.

As the research strategy was developed, however, it became apparent that this choice of method was far from unproblematic. In the light of some contributions to the methodological literature of the social sciences three issues which required to be addressed were identified. These included the need to develop a theoretical perspective from which to undertake the research, the problems which surround the use of interviews as a research method, and the related question of whether information should be obtained through more than one method, and from more than one source. In considering these problems methodological considerations had to be weighed against practical constraints. The conclusions drawn were that a first step could be taken towards developing an appropriate theoretical perspective by adopting a phenomenlogical stance, and that the scope of the study should be restricted to interviews with social work students. The rationale behind these conclusions will be presented here, and the resulting strengths and limitations of the research discussed, under headings relating to the three issues identified above.

3.1. The Choice of Research Perspective

As will be clear from the preceding chapters, a central concern in approaching the development of methods for the monitoring and evaluation of social work education, given the prevailing uncertainty about educational objectives in this field, was to avoid prescribing in advance the knowledge and skills required for practice. An examination of the methodological literature of the social sciences indicated that it would be naive, however, to think that the intention to abandon a prescriptive stance towards the knowledge and skills required would lead per se to an approach which was free of all preconceptions and assumptions. Cicourel (1964, p.222–223) explains why this is so. He points out that unless an explicit conceptual perspective is developed, the way in which information is treated will depend on an implicit model within which the observations made and inferences drawn are likely to interact in unknown ways with the researcher's own biographical situation. His caveat seemed particularly apposite in relation to this research, in view both of the experience of previous researchers in this field, and of my own background as a former social work student and practitioner. Indeed, in the course of reading about and discussing the issues which confront social work education, it became apparent that unless a clear theoretical perspective was developed my own preconceptions and opinions would inevitably intrude, albeit unrecognised, on any attempt to obtain and interpret the kind of information it was hoped would emerge.

The process of developing a theoretical perspective from which to undertake the research involved two stages which can be understood in terms of the distinction drawn by a number of writers between paradigms and theories. Howe (1987) offers a helpful explanation of what is meant by a paradigm within the social sciences:

> In a household dictionary you will find that paradigm is defined as a pattern or example. However, in the social sciences it has taken on a more elaborate meaning. In this corner of life it describes a larger concept in which the assumptions, theories, beliefs, values and methods which make up a particular and preferred view of the world are said to constitute a paradigm. (p.22)

The distinction between paradigms and theories can be described, then, as a distinction between the general and the specific. While a paradigm can be defined as the overall framework within which the social world is understood,

theories constitute specific ways in which social phenomena are explained within the boundaries of a particular paradigm. The first stage in developing the theoretical perspective from which this research was undertaken therefore involved establishing the paradigm within which the research would be undertaken. It is this first stage which will be the focus of the present discussion. The second stage, which involved the development of specific theories, will be set aside for discussion in the following chapter because it pertains to the way in which the information obtained in the course of the research was analysed.

Drawing on the work of Leonard (1975), Howe goes on to describe two major types of paradigm within which social scientists work: the physical sciences paradigm and the human sciences paradigm. Amongst the characteristics which distinguish these paradigms he includes an emphasis within the former on measurement and objectivity, which contrasts with an emphasis within the latter on the importance of subjective understanding. From this perspective, then, the decision discussed in Chapter One to move away from a strategy involving the design of a performance measure towards a qualitative, descriptive approach represents a decision to work within a subjectivist paradigm. An exploration of the strengths and limitations of subjectivism was therefore an important stage in the development of the research strategy. Johnson et al. (1984) define subjectivism in relation to the empiricist strategy it rejects:

> While subjectivism shares with empiricism the view that knowledge is founded in human experience of the world, as a strategy it departs from empiricism in claiming that the defining characteristic of human experience is that it is a constructive, interpretative process which constructs the *known* world. ... "Society", then, is not a set of natural conditions as a result of which observed patterns of behaviour occur, but is a complex of socially constructed meanings. It is composed of the ideas and interpretations that human actors hold about it. To discover these meanings requires an investigation of individuals' subjective interpretations. (pp.75-76)

On the basis of this definition, a subjectivist strategy appeared to have considerable potential in relation to the aims of this research. In particular, the proposition that individuals interpret and construct the known world gave substance to the idea of exploring social work students' approaches to practice through the medium of their own accounts in order to illuminate the ways in which they understand their work, and hence the knowledge on which they

draw. Johnson et al. go on, however, to highlight a problem which became central to the exploration of the methodological issues raised by this research, namely how the ways in which one individual interprets the world can be understood and described by another, except by the imposition of a second interpretative layer which may well distort the first. Their own examination of the work of those writers who have addressed this problem indicates that a variety of different, but equally inconclusive solutions have been proposed. In short, it became apparent in the course of developing this research not only that no ready made solution was available, but also that the problems involved in arriving at a solution confront methodologists and philosophers alike. In common with other writers, notably Giddens (1976) and Silverman (1985), Johnson et al. themselves envisage a solution which depends on a synthesis of perspectives. They acknowledge, however, that such a synthesis remains to be achieved. Under these circumstances it was decided for the purposes of this research to work within the limitations of subjectivism. More specifically, the position taken was based on the work of Alfred Schutz, which therefore requires some examination here.

In his introduction to an edition of Schutz's papers (Schutz, 1970), Wagner describes Schutz's project as a synthesis of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological philosophy and Max Weber's sociology. Husserl's own project, Wagner explains, was the construction of a presuppositionless philosophy which took as its basis the experiences of human beings who live and act in a world which they perceive and interpret so that it makes sense to themselves. There is no aspect of human consciousness, Husserl argued, which appears in and by itself, since consciousness is always consciousness of something. It follows, then, that the focus of Husserl's philosophical inquiry was on human conciousness itself. The first step in such an inquiry, he proposed, is the elimination of preconceived notions about the ultimate nature of phenomena, whether these consist in the naive perceptions of individuals or in the sophisticated interpretations of scientists. What remains after this step of "bracketing out", Husserl suggested, is the process of human consciousness and its objects, which latter are now understood not as objects in an outer world, but as unities of sense or meaning in the inner world of the individual.

Despite this emphasis on individual conciousness, Husserl's phenomenological philosophy initially extended beyond the boundaries of the individual, in that it conceived of intersubjectivity in terms of the extension of individual

conciousness to conciousness of the existence of others. Intersubjectivity, in other words, stems from our apprehension of a society of people who share our conscious social life. As his analysis progressed, however, Husserl arrived at a position which Wagner describes as that of a "transcendental phenomenology" in which both the outer world and the inner consciousness were to be "bracketed out" in order to come face to face with the ultimate structure of consciousness. It is at this point that Schutz departs from Husserl's work, and draws instead on Weber's concept of *verstehen* in order to develop Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity as a sociological method.

Wagner summarises Weber's concept of *verstehen* in terms of his approach to human action, the understanding of which he saw as the fundamental goal of sociology. Action, according to Weber, is human conduct which may consist in physically tangible activities or in activities of the mind, in deliberately refraining from action or in tolerating the actions of others. In each case human conduct is considered action when and insofar as the acting individual attributes a meaning to it, thereby giving it a direction which, in turn, can be understood by others as meaningful. It is through this process of understanding, or *verstehen*, Weber proposed, that sociologists are able to interpret and understand social action.

In Weber's conceptualisation of *verstehen*, Wagner observes, Schutz saw a bridge which would allow him to make a connection between Husserl's phenomenology and the social sciences. Johnson et al. (p.94) offer a helpful summary of the connection he made. While Weber had conceived of the process of *verstehen* as a sociological method, Schutz argued that he had failed to comprehend that the interpretations of the sociological observer were in themselves a purely subjective construction. For Schutz, *verstehen* was not only a sociological method, but also the focus of sociological enquiry, being the process by which we all constitute the social world as a meaningful object.

Moving from this baseline, Schutz went on to focus his development of a phenomenological sociology on the ways in which we use language and interpretative procedures in indicating to ourselves that others exist, and therefore in accounting for the existence of the social world. This process of intersubjectivity is facilitated, he proposes (pp.31–32), by the construction of typical interpretations of phenomena, or typifications, which are learnt and expressed through the medium of language and other behaviours, thus

providing a link between individual, subjective constructions of reality. These typifications are not to be understood, however, as representative of a universal, external reality. Rather they must be regarded only as indicators which point in the direction of another person's subjective reality. In turn, although researchers are able to make use of typifications in interpreting another person's reality their constructs and theories cannot claim to represent a universal reality. In the first place, their constructs and theories cannot go beyond those available as part of the common stock of knowledge through which human beings depict their world. Moreover, no matter how sophisticated they may seem, they remain no more than one of many available interpretations of the phenomena described.

Schutz accepts, then, that the conclusions drawn by researchers about the social world rest on a second layer of interpretation, and hence that the reliability and validity of those conclusions cannot be guaranteed. It is not possible, in other words, to claim with any certainty that the same conclusions drawn by one researcher would be drawn by another, nor that those conclusions are applicable to situations other than the unique situations they describe. In relation to this research a phenomenological approach could not, therefore, be regarded as a panacea for the problems which were encountered in considering the adequacy of an experimental design. Nevertheless a decision was made to pursue such an approach. This decision was not made on the grounds of a greater claim on truth or reality. Rather it was made on the grounds that the approach offered a more appropriate way of contributing to the development of evaluative methods in the field of social work education than was offered by the experimental design, given the uncertainty which prevails in this field.

The strengths of a phenomenological approach lay, it was thought, in providing a stance from which to explore how social work students understand their work while minimising the intrusion of preconceptions. Garfinkel (1967), who took Schutz's work as his own starting point, explains that a phenomenological inquiry should be undertaken from a stance which regards the phenomena under investigation as "anthropologically strange". By this he means that the researcher should not simply assume that familiar interpretations of familiar situations are adequate. Instead, such interpretations should be treated as if they are unfamiliar in order to reveal the usually unremarked ways in which they are constructed. Amongst previous researchers Dingwall (1977) adopted a

not dissimilar stance towards the ways in which health visitor students made sense of their education and training. Similarly, Oleson and Whittaker (1968) adopted a phenomenological stance in order to explore the ways in which student nurses accomodated and integrated the multiple roles and selves involved in becoming both adult members of society and members of their profession.

In stating that the choice of a phenomenological perspective was made on the basis of selecting the most appropriate way of making a contribution to the development of evaluative methods in the field of social work education it is not intended to imply that questions about the reliability and validity of the findings can be simply set aside. Rather it will be necessary to return to those questions both in the course of the following discussion, and in the following chapter.

3.2. The Interview as a Research Method

In the context of this research three problems were posed by the use of the interview as a research method. These concerned the extent to which the process of interviewing might influence the information obtained, the extent to which students' accounts of their work could be regarded as accurate versions of that work, and the related question of whether students might not construct different accounts of their work, either to fulfill different purposes, or as a result of changing perceptions. It was suggested in Chapter Two, for example, that the accounts obtained by Barbour (1984) may have been constructed to meet the perceived expectations of social work teachers. Equally, it could not be assumed that the accounts obtained in the course of this research had not been constructed to a particular end.

The possibility that the process of interviewing may influence the information obtained has received considerable attention in the methodological literature of the social sciences. Cicourel (1964, pp.80-81) highlights the problem when he points out that any interview is, by its very nature, a social interaction. Hence the information obtained will be influenced by social factors such as the degree of rapport established between the participants and the meaning each party attributes to both questions and responses. Every interview, Cicourel observes, is a unique event, in the sense that the identical conditions will not exist again for obtaining information.

While some writers, for example Sudman and Bradburn (1982) have focussed on ways of minimising the influence of social factors on interview data, Denzin (1978) draws together a number of contributions to the methodological literature from which it emerges that the degree of standardisation desirable depends on the focus and aims of the research in question. In summary, a high degree of standardisation is useful only in circumstances where it can be assumed that interviewer and interviewee share the same understanding of the questions asked and responses obtained. When examined in this light it became clear that to attempt to achieve a high degree of standardisation in the context of this research would be to contradict the aims of the research. As has been seen, the intention behind the adoption of a phenomenological stance was precisely to avoid making the assumption that common understandings of social work practice can be taken for granted, and to explore instead social work students' own understanding of their work. Accordingly, it was decided that a more flexible form of interview was required.

Following Richardson et al. (1965), Denzin describes two forms of interview which afford a greater degree of flexibility than is afforded by a highly structured, standardised approach. The first, which he terms the "nonschedule, standardised interview", consists in the use of a list of the information required from each respondent. The phrasing and order of questions can, however, be adapted to suit a particular case. More flexible still is the nonstandardised interview, where no pre-specified list of questions is employed. This type of interview, Denzin notes, has been described by researchers who have employed it as similar to an informal, friendly conversation.

Having examined the uses of highly structured interviews and these more flexible forms, Denzin goes on to point out that it is often possible to combine the three forms so that certain information is obtained from all respondents in addition to information elicited through less structured questioning. In essence, this was the approach which was employed for the purposes of this research. On the one hand it would clearly be useful to obtain certain information from all the student sample, for example about their experiences of particular aspects of their education and training. On the other hand, if their own perceptions of their work were to be explored, a balance was required between an approach so structured that no scope remained for them to describe their work in their own terms and one so unfocussed as to impede the achievement of the aims of the research. The interview schedule which was developed to

meet these different requirements will be described in the following chapter.

In addressing the problem of whether students' accounts of their work could be regarded as accurate versions of that work, or whether they might not be constructed to fulfill a specific purpose, the insights afforded by a phenomenological perspective proved helpful. Garfinkel (1967) points out that to question whether a particular interpretation of events is accurate is to make an unfounded assumption that another source of data would have a greater claim on reality. Accordingly, the questions raised by the use of the interview as a research method revolve not around the internal validity of the accounts obtained, since to pose that question is to assume the possibliity of a more accurate version, but around the researcher's treatment of those accounts. Building on this argument, Garfinkel proposes that respondents' accounts can be treated as versions of reality which make sense in their own context. Hence the task of the researcher is not to appeal to other sources of knowledge to question or corroborate an account, but to reach an understanding of how an account makes sense in the context in which it is offered.

From this perspective students' accounts of their work can, then, be accepted as a valid source of information, with the proviso that in interpreting those accounts the question must be raised and addressed as to why a particular account is offered in a particular context. This resolution of problems relating to the validity of respondents' accounts does not, however, resolve the problem, inherent in a subjectivist approach, of the status to be accorded the researchers' own interpretation of those accounts. This problem will be addressed in the following chapter in relation to the analysis of the information obtained in the course of the research. Here, a further question about the choice of research method requires some consideration, namely whether the use of a combination of methods and sources of information might not have been appropriate.

3.3. The Question of Multiple Methods and Sources

Denzin (1978) suggests that the use of multiple methods, which he terms triangulation, can offer a more complete picture of a research area than one method alone. Other writers, however, have pointed to the existence of problems in such an approach. These problems revolve around the risk of creating what Garfinkel (1967) describes as "ironies". As was seen above,

Garfinkel argues that to attribute greater accuracy to one version of events than to another is to make an unfounded assumption about the relative claim on reality of different interpretations. By ironies, then, he means the conclusions which might be drawn on the basis of using one research method to corroborate or question the findings generated by another. In the context of this research an irony would have been created, for example, had I compared what students said about their work with my own observations of that work and concluded on that basis that the students had distorted the reality of their work in describing it. To draw this conclusion would be to assume that more credibility can be accorded my interpretations of observed behaviour than is warranted by students' own interpretations of their intentions and actions. Having warned of the dangers of creating ironies, however, Garfinkel is able to offer a solution in the form of the argument outlined above: that the task of the researcher is not to appeal to one source of knowledge to corroborate or question another, but to understand how different versions of reality make sense in their own context. With this proviso, most writers appear to be in agreement that the use of multiple perspectives and methods can generate a fuller understanding, in the sense of providing complementary layers of information.

In the light of Garfinkel's work, the decision to limit the scope of this research to one method was based not on any theoretical objection, but on practical considerations. It was anticipated, correctly as it turned out, that the kind of longitudinal, exploratory study of students' approaches to practice envisaged would generate a large amount of material for analysis. If that analysis was to be accomplished within the constraints of the time and resources available, it seemed wiser to accept the limitations of a strategy employing only one method than to embark on the development of a second strand to the study. In short, the advice offered by Patton (1987) seemed apposite:

> Triangulation is ideal. ... But in the real world of limited resources attempts at triangulation may mean a series of poorly implemented methods rather than one approach well implemented. (p.61)

Having made this decision, however, it became necessary to consider the implications of a strategy limited to one research method. In the case of this research, the choice of the interview as the sole means by which information was obtained restricted the scope of the research in ways which became clearer as the strategy was implemented. In particular, it began to emerge from

the accounts of practice obtained that some observation of the interactions which took place between the students and the people with whom they worked would have been helpful in illuminating the information obtained in the course of the research interviews. In the absence of any such observation it was necessary to rely on the work of previous researchers who have focussed on interactional processes to arrive at an understanding of the accounts obtained from the students who took part in this research. While not ideal, this approach went some way towards overcoming the limitations of the research strategy.

On the basis of the practical considerations described above it was also decided to obtain information about students' approaches to practice only from students' themselves. While there is little doubt that the research could not have been completed within a reasonable time scale had practical considerations not been taken into account, this decision imposed significant limitations on the scope of the study. In particular, it was not possible to adequately address the question of whether students' different approaches to practice could be regarded as representing different levels of performance. The methodological issues involved will be discussed here before concluding this chapter.

An examination of the literature pertaining to the evaluation of social work practice suggests that assessing the extent to which different approaches to practice represent different levels of performance would in any case have been problematic, since what constitutes success in social work is difficult to define. Thomas (1988) summarises the difficulties involved. These include not only the problems involved in defining the nature and purpose of social work, but also the fact that a particular piece of work may have multiple, possibly conflicting aims, and that needs, and hence success, may be viewed differently by practitioners, clients and administrators. These difficulties are compounded in the context of a longitudinal study of students' practice, because in this context it is difficult to control the many variables which might have some bearing on what is considered to be a successful outcome, for example the different remits of the agencies under whose auspics students work, or the varying complexity of the work which might be undertaken even under the auspices of a single agency.

Despite these difficulties, it is acknowledged that a second perspective on students' different approaches to practice would have been helpful in gaining at

least some indication as to how those different approaches were perceived by other interested parties. In particular, as a growing number of studies have demonstrated, clients' views can shed much light on the extent to which social workers' activities are perceived to be helpful by the people they are intended to help. The then innovatory study of clients' views undertaken by Mayer and Timms (1970), illuminated, for example, the clash of perspectives which could ensue when social workers framed their clients' problems in terms of psychoanalytic theory. More recently Howe (1989) has revealed similar problems in the context of a systemic approach to family therapy. It cannot be taken for granted, then, that approaches which are assumed to be helpful by social work practitioners or educators will be found to be helpful by those they are intended to help.

The implications for this research concern the contribution made to the development of methods for the monitoring and evaluation of social work education. In the absence of a second perspective on students' different approaches to practice, the contribution made by this study concerns only the issue of students' use of course content in practice. While it is thought that this represents a significant contribution, given the limitations of experimental research in relation to this issue, the equally important issue of the effectiveness of different approaches to practice remains to be addressed. In Chapter Nine an attempt has been made to shed some light on this issue by comparing the findings of this research with those of previous researchers who have explored clients' perspectives on social work. For the moment the main areas which have been addressed in this chapter will be summarised before moving on to consider the way in which the research strategy described here was implemented.

Summary

In this chapter the development of the research strategy has been described in terms of the methodological issues raised. It has been seen that a combination of theoretical and practical considerations led to a decision to undertake the research from a phenomenological perspective deployed through the medium of flexibly structured interviews with social work students. Although it has been suggested that this research strategy has considerable strengths in relation to some of the problems which confront the development of evaluative methods in this educational field, it has also been acknowledged that the

restriction of the strategy to one method and source of information imposed limitations on the conclusions which can be drawn. In particular, it proved impossible to address the question of the relative effectiveness of the different approaches to pactice identified in the course of the research within the time and resources available.

Chapter 4
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH STRATEGY

Introduction

As was the case with the development of the research strategy, its implementation involved a balancing out of theoretical and practical considerations. On this basis it was decided that the study should take the form of an exploration of the practice of two groups of students, drawn from consecutive cohorts, who were undertaking one social work course. These decisions will be discussed here in relation to three areas: the choice of the social work course which became the focus of the study; the students who took part in the research and the timetabling of the study; and the design of the interview schedule. The way in which the students' accounts of their work were analysed will then be described and the question of the validity of the analysis addressed.

4.1. The Course Chosen as The Focus of Study

As was noted in Chapter One, it was originally envisaged that this research would provide a comparative analysis of the performance of students entering training by a variety of different routes. In the context of the research strategy adopted, however, a comparative analysis posed problems. In particular, given the amount of information likely to be generated by each research interview, the number of respondents required to make a comparative analysis meaningful seemed to preclude the possibilty of undertaking such an analysis within the timescale of the research. In addition, it was thought that to introduce the range of variables associated with different training routes would be to compound the problems involved in analysing material which was likely in any case to be highly idiosyncratic. What was required, it seemed, was a sample of students sufficiently large to enable patterns to emerge from their accounts of their work, thus facilitating the exploration of an unforeseen number of variables, but homogenous enough to make that analysis manageable within the constraints of the research timetable. For these reasons it was decided to

restrict the focus of the study to one social work course. This decision has implications, however, for the generalisability of the research findings, in that the extent to which the findings are relevant to other students entering training by different routes remains unknown.

The course chosen was a two year postgraduate course offered by the department within which the research was being carried out. This decision had advantages, but it also raised some problems. The advantages lay in the accessibility of the students concerned, and in the interest of both the department and myself in this particular course. While the department's interest lay in the concerns of teaching staff to begin to develop methods of evaluation by focussing on their own work rather than on that of other teachers, my interest lay in the fact that this course was the one I had completed some three years prior to beginning the Ph.D. research. The problems raised, however, also lay in my earlier involvement with the course. There was a strong temptation, for example, at the beginning of the project, to view social work students as underdogs in an unequal relationship with their teachers. This was accompanied by a concern that the findings of the study might offend and be rejected by my former teachers. In addition, because the course chosen was the one I had undertaken, many aspects of the students' educational experiences appeared familiar. Although that familiarity afforded information and insights which might otherwise have been unavailable, it also had disadvantages, in that it was all too easy to assume that my perspective would be shared by the students who took part in the research. These problems were only overcome through the process of undertaking the research, but two helpful aspects of that process can be outlined here.

Firstly, in the course of reviewing the history and literature of social work education it became apparent that, depending on the perspective taken, social work students may not be the underdogs they appeared to be. Rather, social work educators might equally be seen as underdogs constrained not only by historical and social forces, but also by the demands of students and others, to perform an increasingly difficult and complex task with the aid of limited resources.

Secondly, the perspective afforded by adopting a phenomenological stance was particularly helpful in overcoming the problems raised by my familiarity with the course chosen as the focus of study. As was seen in the preceding chapter,

it was intended to adopt a stance from which students' experiences and perceptions of practice would be regarded as anthropologically strange. As I began to develop greater expertise in adopting and maintaining this stance, in ways which will be described shortly, the students' accounts of their experiences did indeed begin to appear strange, and to require a more wide ranging analysis than could be afforded by my own stock of knowledge about their course.

Before moving on to describe the selection of the students who took part in the research and the related issue of the timetabling of the study, the course which became the focus of the study requires some brief description. This has been drawn from the outline provided for students.

During the first year, in addition to a practice placement undertaken concurrently with the second and third academic terms, teaching was provided in social policy, sociology, psychology, human development and principles and practice of social work. Both group and individual tutorials were also provided. The course in principles and practice of social work was divided into two parts. Part One aimed to provide both a broad grounding in social work theory, practice and skills, and an introductory framework applicable to a wide range of methods and settings. The teaching methods used included lectures, talks by practitioners, excercises and discussions in small groups, and role play, including, in the second term, the use of audio-visual equipment. Part Two covered social work in residential and day care settings and social work with families. Between the end of the first academic year and the beginning of the autumn term the students undertook a second, full time practice placement lasting ten weeks.

The second year of the course included, in addition to continuing group and individual tutorials, courses covering the following areas: social work practice; social work and social philosophy; social need, social policy and social work practice; psychology, human development and psychiatry; organisational analysis and change; law and social work; and the transition to work. In addition to this wide range of courses the students were asked to opt for one specialist class, and to select a number of topics for study in a series of professional practice seminars. The course in social work practice covered group work, mental health and psycho-sexual counselling, and social work practice with children and young people. The course in social need, social

policy and social work practice included community work, children in care and substitute care, a three-day conference on ethnicity and social work, social work with older people and their families, a two-day conference on child abuse and teaching on addictions. The range of teaching methods used again included lectures, role play, the use of audio-visual equipment, talks by practitioners and small group discussions. A final concurrent practice placement was undertaken from the second half of the autumn term until the end of the academic year.

This course, then, was fairly typical of many courses leading to a qualification in social work, in that it aimed to cover a wide range of material from an equally wide range of perspectives.

4.2. The Students Who Took Part in The Research and The Timetabling of The Study

Having decided to focus on the work of students who were undertaking the course described above, it was necessary to decide at what stages of training they should be interviewed. Had it been possible, it would have been ideal to have interviewed all the students who took part in the research at the beginning of training and at the end of each year of their course, which coincided with the end of their first and final practice placements. To have waited for the arrival of a new intake of students would, however, have been to delay the commencement of data collection for some six months. Moreover, at this stage of the research it was by no means certain that the study could be extended over the period of time required to interview the next intake of students at the end of training. In the event, as will be seen shortly, it did prove possible to achieve this because the analysis of the information already obtained was by then at an advanced stage. In the meantime it was decided to conduct interviews with some of the students currently in their first year of training, and I therefore approached this cohort at the end of a class to ask for volunteers to take part in the research. What would be involved for participants was explained in some detail, and because the research was being undertaken under the auspices of the students' own department the confidentiality of the interview material was stressed. It was agreed that in writing about or discussing the research all names and other details which might identify the people and places concerned would be omitted or changed so as to be unrecognisable.

As a result of this appeal, seven women, but no men, volunteered to take part. Because it was thought that it would be helpful in obtaining a wider range of perspectives if some men also took part, one of the supervisors of the research undertook to ask specifically the following week for male volunteers. As a result, three men offered to participate. This raised some interesting questions about the different perspectives which might be brought to practice by the original volunteers and those who had responded to an appeal from a senior member of staff, or indeed by men and women more generally. In fact, somewhat to my surprise, an analysis of the material generated in the course of the research revealed no differences of perspective between the men and women who took part which could be related either to gender or to the method of selection.

It was anticipated that the ten students who had volunteered to take part in the research would be interviewed towards the end of their first and final practice placements, and that further volunteers would be sought from the next intake of students in order to obtain information about students' approaches to practice prior to training. On the basis of the information which emerged from the first series of interviews it was decided, however, to select the second group of students rather than to rely on volunteers. The reasons behind this decision lay partly in the fact that the original volunteer group was helpfully, but fortuitously, constituted, in that it encompassed students who differed widely in terms of the extent of their previous experience. Because the information emerging from the study suggested that both the least experienced and the most experienced students were encountering particular difficulties, it was decided that the second group should include students whose background encompassed these two extremes, and that this should not be left to chance. In addition, neither any member of the original group, nor in fact any member of their cohort, had pre-training experience of work in a local authority area team, and it was thought that it might be interesting to include students with this type of experience in the study. For these reasons, then, it was decided to select a second group rather than rely on volunteers.

Accordingly, letters were written to ten students who met the criteria outlined above, and who had accepted a place on the course about to commence, explaining both what would be involved in the research and why they were being asked to take part. Within the first few days of their course, these students were invited to take part in a meeting so that the question of their

participation and issues of confidentiality could be addressed in more detail. Only nine students attended the meeting, and a tenth student was therefore separately asked to take part. In the event, however, the student who had not attended the meeting contacted me and was keen to participate, and these eleven students therefore formed the second research group. The selection of this second sample of students again raised questions about the different perspectives which might be brought to training by the students who had volunteered to take part and those who had been selected, but again no difference of perspective emerged which could be attributed to the method of selection.

The eleven students who formed the second research group were interviewed within the first two weeks of their course about the work in which they had been engaged prior to training. It was anticipated that they would be interviewed again at the end of their first practice placement, while a decision would be taken at a later stage as to whether it was viable to conduct a third set of interviews towards the end of their final placement. If this proved possible, it was anticipated that a total of fifty three interviews would be conducted. In the event it did prove possible to conduct the third set of interviews. By this stage, however, two students from the second group had suspended their training, and a total of fifty one interviews were therefore conducted. Although the students were not interviewed in any depth about their second, full time placement, which four students had undertaken in North America, some information about their experiences during this placement was obtained at the end of their education and training. The overall composition and timetabling of the interviews, which bridged three academic years, was as follows:

June, Year 1	Volunteer Group (10 students) interviewed about first placement work.
Oct., Year 2	Selected Group (11 students) interviewed about pre-training work.
June, Year 2	Volunteer Group (10 students) interviewed about final placement work. Selected Group (11 students) interviewed about first placement work.
June, Year 3	Selected Group (9 students) interviewed about final placement work.

Prior to their first interview the twenty one students who took part in the research were asked to complete a simple questionnaire designed to obtain information about their age, previous experiences of practice and educational background, including whether they had previously studied three subjects commonly thought relevant for social work: sociology, psychology and social policy. On the basis of this questionnaire, the following information was compiled.

In age, the students ranged from twenty-two to thirty-six years old at the beginning of training, the average age amongst them being twenty-seven years. The length of their previous social work experience ranged from that of one student who had a year's experience of voluntary work, to that of three students who had between eight and thirteen years' experience obtained largely in paid employment. The average length of previous experience was just under four and a half years. Fourteen of the twenty-one students had gained all their experience in residential and day care settings, while three students, in addition to some experience in these settings, had been employed more recently as trainees or assistants in local authority area teams. Of the remaining students, three had gained their experience working in either a voluntary or paid capacity with community based projects providing services for people with needs relating to mental health or ageing, while one student had specialised in working with adolescents. Seven students had gained all their experience in one job, while fourteen had held two or more posts.

As far as their academic qualifications were concerned, four students had obtained an ordinary degree, one student had obtained a third class degree, nine had obtained a lower second, and seven an upper second. None of the students who took part in the research had obtained a first class degree. Eleven students had studied one or more of the three subjects thought relevant for social work as part of their undergraduate degree course, and a further four had studied one or more at school or since their degree. Six students had not previously studied any of these subjects. The significance of these background characteristics is considered in Chapter Nine.

4.3. The Design of The Interview Schedule

As was seen in the previous chapter, it was decided that a balance was required between an interview schedule so structured that little scope remained

for the students to describe their work in their own way, and one so unstructured as to impede the achievement of the aims of the research. The first stage in designing the schedule consisted in determining the scope of the interviews. In order to provide a clear focus, it was decided to concentrate on exploring each student's work with one particular client or group. Where placement as opposed to pre-training work was concerned it was decided to focus on a piece of work about which the students had chosen to write in fulfillment of course requirements for the submission of two practice-based essays towards the end of the first and final placements. The aim of using this written material was to obtain a preliminary grasp of the type of placement agency and work involved, thus reducing the need for initial questioning. It was also thought that some initial indication of the sort of issues which might repay exploration would be gleaned. The students' permission was therefore sought for me to have access to unmarked copies of the relevant written work. On the basis of the information thus obtained each interview schedule was individually designed, within a broad standard framework, to guide me in addressing the issues identified if they did not arise in the course of the conversation. Since it was not possible to use written material in discussing their pre-training work with the second group of students, these students were asked instead to choose a piece of recent work which they thought was representative of their practice. In general these interviews tended to be longer than those based on written work, because I had to glean a considerable amount of basic information about the type of work and setting involved. In addition they were more difficult to conduct since they required me to think on my feet to a greater extent in order to identify those issues which required further exploration.

Despite some practical advantages, it was thought that by focussing on one piece of work, and particularly by focussing on work about which the students had written in fulfilment of course requirements, a degree of distortion might have been introduced in that the work might not be typical of a student's approach. In order to try to assess the extent of any distortion three questions addressing some key areas of concern were included in the interview schedule. At each interview the students were asked whether they thought I would have formed a different impression of their practice if a different piece of work had been discussed. They were then asked why they had chosen to describe or write about this particular piece of work. When they had previously written about their work they were also asked whether they had done more reading in

relation to this work than in relation to the rest of their placement work. This latter question was intended to assess whether an atypically theoretical account of a piece of work might have been developed as a result of meeting essay requirements.

An analysis of the material generated by the research suggests that in some respects these concerns were unfounded since the use of a broad exploratory approach enabled the students to make comparisons between the work they described and other work they had undertaken. In this way it became possible to construe any differences as variables requiring further exploration and analysis. In one important respect, however, the decision to base the interviews on work chosen by the students did influence the focus of the research, in that the students unanimously reported that in order either to fulfill essay requirements, or to provide interesting material for discussion, they had chosen work which had some "meat" or substance to it. In their view short term work, involving only one or two meetings with clients, was not appropriate material. Consequently the focus of the research is on their longer term work and excludes, in particular, the short term assessment of need and provision of material resources. With this exception, a wide variety of work was discussed, including work undertaken in area team settings, residential, group and community work.

The framework of the interview schedule and the more specific lines of questioning pursued were developed in the course of a series of eight pilot interviews conducted with social work students who were undertaking a one year course of education and training within the same university department as the students who subsequently took part in the research proper. In addition to assisting in the development of the interview schedule, it was hoped that this series of interviews would enable me to develop appropriate interviewing skills. They proved to be an invaluable exercise, and the contribution made in both respects will be described here in turn.

The development of the interview schedule

In relation to the framework and content of the interview schedule, the pilot interviews were particularly useful. To begin with, despite the difficulties described by Corby (1982) which were discussed in Chapter Two, anxiety about having some formal structure had resulted in an attempt to divide the interview schedule into areas covering assessment, decision making, and intervention,

following the commonly prescribed problem solving framework. Like Corby's respondents, however, the students who took part in the pilot interviews experienced difficulty in describing their work within this framework. In addition the interviews were very difficult to conduct because it was rarely clear what point in the schedule had been reached. These difficulties eventually proved helpful, since in addressing the problem a more helpful structure emerged.

On listening to recordings of the pilot interviews it seemed that when the students experienced difficulty in describing their work within the framework offered, this was because from their perspective their work had not been structured along the lines of a problem solving format, but had evolved in the manner of a story unfolding as time elapsed. In order to take this perspective into account the interview schedule was redesigned using a simple story structure involving a beginning, a middle and an end. The beginning segment was further divided in order to explore the students' approach prior to meeting the people with whom they worked for the first time as well as their approach to that first meeting. This story like framework proved more helpful in enabling the students to describe their work, although some students continued to experience difficulties which will be discussed when the findings are presented. Depending in part on how much difficulty was experienced, but also on the complexity of the work described, the length of the interviews varied considerably from one and a half to four hours. In some cases it was necessary to conduct the longer interviews in two stages, either because of constraints on the students' time, or in order to avoid exhaustion for both participants.

The pilot interviews were also helpful in developing useful lines of questioning. Eight lines of questioning seemed to open up interesting avenues for exploration. After asking the students to describe a segment of their work in detail these eight lines of questioning were pursued before moving onto the next segment. They included: how the student had made sense of the information they had obtained; what skills or abilities they had drawn on in the course of the interactions they had described; what had contributed to each of these facets of their approach; how they had felt about undertaking the work; what their own preoccupations had been; how clear they had felt about what they were doing; whether anything had been particularly helpful to them; and whether they thought anything could have helped them more. Before exploring the ending of each piece of work a further set of questions was asked. These concerned the students' overall understanding of the situation they had

described, how they had arrived at that understanding, and, again, what had contributed, been helpful or might have helped in that process.

These basic lines of questioning were augmented as the research developed in the light of the students' responses, in order to explore particular patterns of responses further. For example, during the first set of research interviews three students indicated that written work, such as case notes and summaries, had been helpful to them in undertaking the work they described. In order to explore this issue further a question about the usefulness or otherwise of written work was later included in the interview schedule and yielded some interesting information. Developments in each student's practice were also explored by including in the interview schedule questions about whether their approach would have been different at an earlier stage of training, together with questions designed to address particular issues which had been explored during previous interviews with the same student.

The final section of the interview schedule contained questions designed to elicit information, along the lines of the critical incident technique described in Chapter Two, about what the students perceived as the successes and failures of their work, about what they had learnt and identified as future learning needs, and about what they understood to be the hallmarks of a good social worker. Questions were also included here to directly address the students' perceptions of their education and training. These questions were tailored to fit the different stages of training at which the students were interviewed. Within the broad framework provided by the schedule the students were free to describe their work in their own way, while I was also free to pursue interesting lines of enquiry until a particular subject seemed to be exhausted.

A copy of the basic interview schedule is contained in the appendix to the thesis, together with a copy of the questionnaire used to obtain information about the students' background characteristics.

The development of appropriate interviewing skills

In relation to the development of appropriate interviewing skills, a principle area of concern was how to put into practice the phenomenological stance described in the previous chapter. In this respect the pilot interviews were also particularly helpful, since it proved to be easier said than done. Although I emerged from the first pilot interviews with the impression that a helpful

rapport had been established and that some interesting information had been obtained, on listening to recordings of the interviews the information which had emerged seemed disappointing. Eventually it became apparent that some of the ways in which everyday conversation is managed were intruding on the aims of the research. An example concerns the way in which the students would tail off their responses with phrases such as "... know what I mean ...", or simply "you know ...", which appeared to cue me to respond in the affirmative, thus curtailing the possibility of any more detailed discussion of the topic in question. As the pilot interviews proceeded it was possible to explore ways of circumventing this kind of problem, and although my first attempts felt rather strained with practice some less awkward techniques were developed. Where it was appropriate, for example, I could explain that a particular area of work or issue was unfamiliar and ask for more details, or I could respond to "...you know" along the lines of "mm, I was interested in what you were saying just then about ...". As my confidence in taking this kind of approach increased it became correspondingly easier to regard the information emerging as anthropologically strange. In turn, as was noted earlier, the students' experiences and perceptions did indeed come to seem strange to me, and to require a more broadly based analysis than at first seemed necessary.

All the interviews were tape-recorded, with the students' permission, using a small and therefore relatively unobtrusive recorder, and the tapes were later transcribed by myself. Although this was a time consuming and somewhat tedious process the opportunity to reflect on each interview by reliving it, as it were, was helpful both in continuing to develop useful interviewing techniques and in beginning to interpret the material obtained.

4.4. The Analysis of The Interview Transcripts

The findings which will be presented in subsequent chapters of the thesis were derived from the interview transcripts by means of an inductive analysis, a process which Silverman (1985, p.111) describes as the method by which qualitative researchers or ethnographers attempt to formulate generalisations which hold accross all their data. Becker (1971) offers a more detailed discussion of the method with the dual aim of demonstrating its rigour and of refuting the common criticism that it involves nothing more than "immersing oneself in data and having insights". Although Becker's paper focusses

primarily on participant observation, his discussion was helpful in understanding the process involved in analysing the material generated by this research and the main points will therefore be outlined here before going on to describe something of my own experience of the method.

Becker describes three preliminary stages in the analysis of qualitative data. The first stage involves the examination of emerging information in the light of existing sociological theory, in order to assist in the development of hypotheses based on a wider stock of knowledge than that afforded by the researcher's assumptions alone. The second stage consists in ascertaining the distribution and frequency of particular phenomena by seeking to discover how typical and widespread they are, and how they are distributed amongst categories of people. On this basis it is then possible to assess how likely it is that the conclusions drawn are accurate. Becker compares this process with that employed by the statistician who decides the likely accuracy of a conclusion on the basis of statistical tests of significance. Following this assessment, the third stage of the analysis consists in the construction of models to describe and explain the data obtained. In the process of constructing these models individual findings are brought together with the aim of describing the complex relationships between them. The models thus constructed are then reviewed and refined in the light of all the data obtained and the links between different models sought. In this way the construction of an overall model is begun.

Once data collection is complete, Becker suggests, a fourth stage becomes necessary. At this stage the researcher sets about systematically checking and rechecking the developing models, rebuilding them with as many safeguards as the data will allow. The logical consequences of the conclusions reached are described, and the data checked to ascertain whether or not they support those conclusions. Reasonable alternative hypotheses are considered, and checks made as to whether the evidence supports or refutes them. In order to facilitate this final stage, Becker suggests that the researcher index and arrange the material generated by the study so that every item of information is included and taken account of in assessing the accuracy of the conclusions reached.

Having summarised Becker's description of an inductive analysis, it would be inaccurate to suggest that, armed with his guidelines, I was able to put the

method into practice smoothly and without hitch. On the contrary, the process of analysing the interview transcripts was quite bewildering, and it proved all too easy to become lost in a maze of information which seemed idiosyncratic and disconnected. This problem was compounded by the fact that the interviews which generated the material for analysis were conducted at several points in time, with the result that a great deal of uncertainty about the eventual conclusions had to be contained while the analysis of the first transcripts proceeded. Often my anxiety about reaching some more certain conclusions intruded, resulting in a rather black and white approach which was no sooner translated onto paper than it was swept aside. Moreover, the elation of every insight gained was swiftly followed by the onerous task of completely rethinking previous conclusions in the light of a new perspective. It would probably be more accurate to describe my experience of the inductive method as one of discovering what was involved through encountering problems and having to resolve them, than to suggest that it involved only the orderly implementation of a tried and tested set of guidelines. Some aspects of my experience can, however, be illustrated by comparing them with Becker's description.

Firstly, Becker's suggestion that preliminary observations be placed in the context of existing sociological theory in order to extend the analysis beyond the researcher's own assumptions very closely matched the process involved in developing an understanding of the students' accounts of their work. As was seen in the previous chapter, the first stage in the development of the theoretical perspective from which the research was undertaken had involved establishing the paradigm within which it would be located. Faced with the task of making sense of the ever increasing amount of idiosyncratic seeming material generated by the research, however, it rapidly became clear that some more specific concepts were required if any sense was going to be made of the students' accounts.

Accordingly, I set about combing the literature of those disciplines which seemed potentially relevant for concepts which might illuminate the students' experiences, and in the course of this rather desperate quest the value of the work of those sociologists who have explored the management of face to face interactions became apparent. In addition, concepts derived from other fields of study, for example professional socialisation, occupational psychology, educational theory and social work education itself also provided some helpful

ways of thinking about the students' experiences. The utility of these concepts had to be constantly reviewed, however, in the light of the students' accounts and this process was one which for a long time seemed endless. The problem was one of achieving a balance between pinning the analysis on existing concepts derived from different disciplines and developing those concepts further by weaving them into my own analysis of the students' experiences. In this respect the ordering and reordering of the material contained in the interview transcripts, although far removed from the orderly process which Becker recommends, was of some assistance and will therefore be described here.

In the process of attempting to make sense of the first set of interview transcripts generated by the research I developed a method for placing together similar seeming information from each transcript under headings assigned in the light of those concepts which at that time seemed to offer the best interpretation of the phenomena described. This consisted of no more than making condensed notes with page references under the relevant headings and ensuring that all the information obtained had been included somewhere. As the interviews proceeded, however, the headings used changed in accordance with the emergence of new ideas and concepts, with the result that the notes relating to each set of transcripts were organised quite differently. Eventually these notes were only useful as an index to the transcripts which I could interpret but which would have made little sense to anyone else, and I therefore decided to re-analyse all the transcripts once the first four sets of interviews were completed. At this stage I was able to place information from all the transcripts together under the same headings, thus making it possible to confirm that all the information obtained had been included and to adapt the headings used as necessary.

This re-analysis of the first four sets of interview transcripts proved particularly helpful in enabling the research to be extended to include interviews with the second group of students who took part in the research towards the end of their education and training. Given that this set of interviews was undertaken towards the end of the third year of the project it was not possible, within the timescale of the study, to transcribe the material generated as fully as that generated by the first four sets of interviews. Because an extensive analysis had already been undertaken, however, it was possible to use the headings which had been developed to take notes during and immediately after each

interview, and to use the tape counter to reference segments of each interview which it might be useful to transcribe.

Although the re-analysis undertaken once the first four sets of interviews were completed proved helpful, then, in extending the scope of the research, the headings which emerged from that re-analysis did not in themselves constitute a model to explain the information obtained in the course of the research. Rather the construction of a model to explain the information obtained involved a much longer, more complex process of forging connections between the headings which had been developed, and again adapting them when attempts to do so proved unsuccessful. In effect this process was synonymous with the writing up of the information obtained, because it was only in the process of trying and failing on numerous occasions to write a clear, cohesive account that discrepancies and contradictions in the analysis came to light. The process of writing up the research findings was therefore in itself a crucial stage in the analytical process.

Eventually, after a great deal of drafting and redrafting, followed by an equally lengthy process of fine tuning, the model which is presented in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight was constructed. That model consists in a typology of three approaches to social work practice within which the development of the students' practice as they progressed through training can be understood. No matter how systematic or painstaking the process of analysis, however, the validity of this model cannot be guaranteed because it represents only one interpretation of the students' accounts of their work. A discussion of the steps taken to overcome this problem and of the prevailing limitations of the analysis will conclude this chapter.

4.5. The Validity of The Analysis

Garfinkel (1967) suggests that respondents' own comments on an analysis can give some indication as to its validity, and his suggestion seemed to offer at least a partial solution to the problems of validity raised by this research. Accordingly, the students who took part in the research were invited to comment, before leaving the university, on earlier drafts of the material presented in the following chapters. Because of the way in which the analysis developed, it was not possible for the volunteer group to comment on the findings in the form in which they are presented here, but they were able to

comment on a preliminary analysis of their accounts of their first placement experiences. The selected group were, however, able to comment on a first draft of the findings as they are presented here. Overall, the students' were in agreement that those aspects of the analysis they were able to assess made good sense and seemed to reflect their experiences. They were also able to suggest some helpful adjustments of emphasis and alternative explanations which influenced the final analysis.

Despite this attempt at validation, it remains the case that the model presented here represents only one possible interpretation of the students' accounts. That this is the case was highlighted by one of the students who was able to comment on the analysis in the form in which it is presented here, and who suggested that it would be interesting to re-analyse the information obtained from the perspective provided by cognitive psychology. Were his suggestion to have been implemented, a different model would certainly have resulted.

In a recent paper Jones (1990) suggests that a solution to this problem of multiple perspectives may lie in subjecting the researcher's interpretations to a deconstructionist analysis in order to reveal what has been left out. From a phenomenological perspective, however, his suggestion does not seem capable of resolving the problem of intersubjectivity which lies at the heart of the matter, since a deconstructionist analysis would itself depend on the interpretations of the analyst. At any rate, the solution Jones proposes has not been adopted here. Instead the model presented here rests on my own interpretation, informed by a combination of sociological and other perspectives, of the accounts of practice I obtained. For this reason the validity of the model depends not on any claim to be the only correct interpretation of the students' accounts, but on the extent to which it offers a useful way of understanding the development of their practice. An attempt has been made to enable readers to make their own assessment of the utility of the model by including substantial extracts from the students' accounts.

Summary

The focus of this chapter has been on the way in which the strategy developed to address the aims of the research was implemented. It has been seen that fifty one interviews were conducted with twenty one students undertaking one postgraduate course at two, and in some cases three, stages of their education and training. In the course of each interview one piece of work undertaken by

the student concerned was explored in detail. The analysis of the material generated by these interviews has been described with reference to the validity of the model which was constructed to explain the development of the students' practice as they progressed through training. In the following chapter the connections between this model and the interviews which generated the information in which it is grounded will be explained.

Chapter 5
THE TYPOLOGY OF APPROACHES TO PRACTICE

Introduction

As was noted in the previous chapter, the analysis of the fifty one accounts of practice obtained in the course of the research led to the construction of a model consisting in a typology of three approaches to social work practice. These three approaches were distinguished on the basis of the knowledge which underpinned each approach and the ways in which that knowledge was used. They have been described as an everyday social approach, a fragmented approach and a fluent approach to reflect their distinguishing features. In the following chapters the three approaches will be described in turn and illustrated with extracts from the students' accounts of their work. As with any typology, however, it has been necessary, in the interests of clarity, to present a rather stereotypical picture of each approach. It has also been necessary to set aside some aspects of the information obtained in the course of the research in order to focus in more detail on others. As a result the reader may find him or herself wondering, for example, about the range of approaches deployed by students at the same stage of training, about what has become of some of the lines of enquiry pursued in the course of the research interviews, or about the absence of topics which seem relevant to a particular theme.

In recognition of these problems, it is the aim of this chapter to provide a range of information about the typology and its relationship to the information obtained in the course of the research interviews. In the first section of the chapter the terminology used in describing the three aproaches will be discussed. In the second section an overview of the educational context of the three approaches will then be presented by describing their distribution accross the different stages of training at which the students were interviewed. In the third section the meaning of the typology of approaches will be considered. The fourth section will then provide some information about topics which have either been set aside for discussion in later chapters or omitted from the thesis altogether, while the fifth and final section will provide some information about the way in which extracts from the students' accounts have been presented to

illustrate the three approaches.

5.1. The Terminology Used in Describing The Three Approaches to Practice

The terminology used in describing the three approaches which are the focus of the following chapters differs somewhat from the terminology normally used to describe social work practice. For example, the term assessment has not been used to describe the process of arriving at an understanding of a situation because the information contained in the students' accounts about this aspect of their work could not be encompassed within the rather formal meaning of the term. Instead, where a general term is required, this process has been described as one of making sense of a situation. Similarly, where a general term is required to describe the way in which the students approached their interactions with the people with whom they worked this facet of their work has been described in terms of their approach to the management of their interactions. Within these broad definitions two more specific aspects of the ways in which the students managed their interactions and made sense of the situations they described are examined. These concern the ways in which they went about obtaining and interpreting information. While the term assessment is commonly used to encompass both these facets of practice, it has been used in the following chapters only to describe the formal reports which the students were sometimes required to compile in the course of their work. Equally, the ways in which the students attempted to help the people with whom they worked have rarely been described as interventions, because this term again proved too narrow to encompass the information contained in their accounts. The term intervention has therefore only been used as the students' used it, to describe some of the deliberate, formal ways of helping people which they associated largely with different methodologies to which they were introduced in the course of their education and training. For the most part this aspect of the students' work has simply been described as their approach to helping people.

Finally, in the context of presenting a generalised description of the three approaches to practice it proved necessary to use the term "client" sparingly, not on the grounds of any objections to the term itself, but because in many cases the term was inappropriate. In some cases, for example, the people with whom the students' worked were not their designated clients, while in other

cases, particularly in the context of community work, the term was redundant. Hence the term client has only been used to refer to a designated client. In some contexts where the term is inappropriate the term "informants" has been used. Otherwise the sometimes rather clumsy phrase "people with whom the students worked" has been employed.

5.2. The Distribution of The Three Approaches to Practice

As was noted in the previous chapter, the typology of approaches to practice represents a model within which the development of the students' practice as they progressed through training can be understood. The students' progress from one approach to another was not, however, related solely to their stage of training. Information about the distribution of the three approaches accross the different stages of training at which the students were interviewed is presented overleaf in the form of three pie charts. Figure One depicts the approaches to practice deployed prior to training by the eleven students who were interviewed at this stage. In Figure Two information is collated about the approaches deployed by all twenty one students who took part in the research during their first practice placement. Similarly, in Figure Three information is collated about the approaches deployed during their final placement by all nineteen students who were interviewed at this stage.

When the information presented in the three pie charts is taken together, it can be seen that nine of the fifty one accounts of practice obtained in the course of the research depicted an everyday social approach, thirty three depicted a fragmented approach and nine depicted a fluent approach. Taking each pie chart separately, it can be seen that six of the eleven students interviewed at the beginning of training had deployed an everyday social approach prior to training, while five had deployed a fragmented approach. None of the students interviewed at this stage had deployed a fluent approach. By the end of the first placement, however, this pattern of distribution had changed. Only two of the twenty one students interviewed at this stage had deployed an everyday social approach, while sixteen students had deployed a fragmented approach. In addition three students had deployed a fluent approach. Towards the end of training the pattern had again changed slightly. At this stage only one student had deployed an everyday social approach, twelve students had deployed a fragmented approach and six students had deployed a fluent approach.

Key

- Everyday Social Approach
- Fragmented Approach
- Fluent Approach

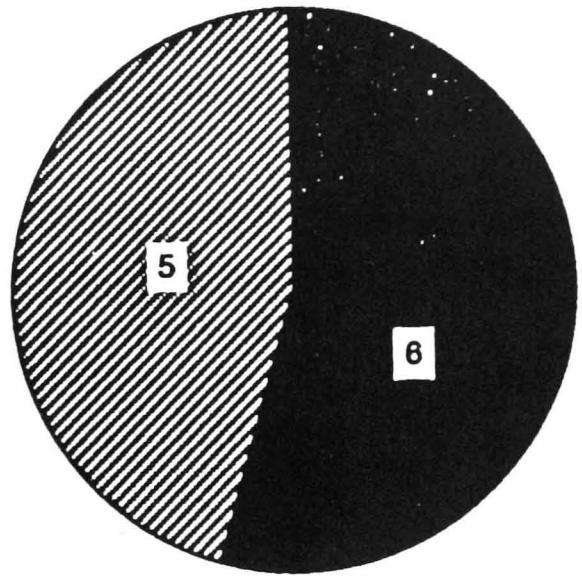

Figure One

Pre-training

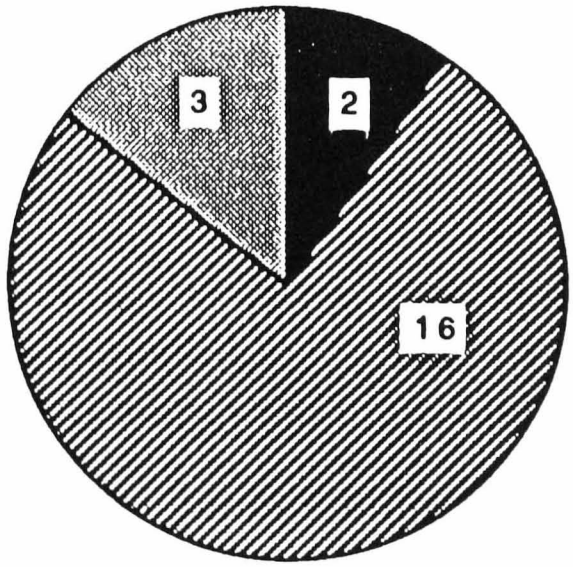

Figure Two

First Placement

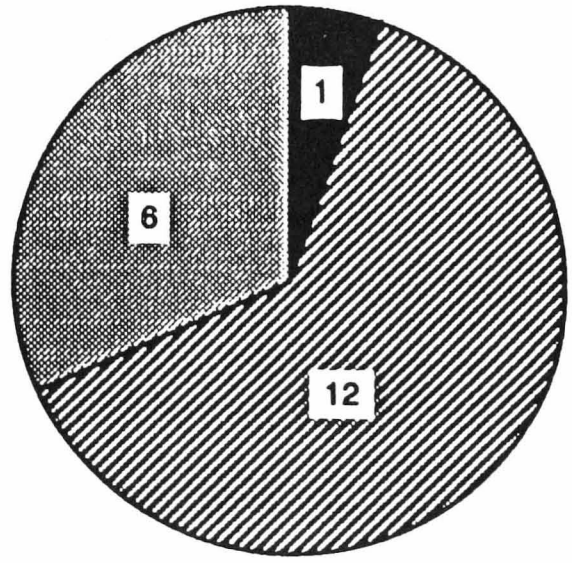

Figure Three

Final Placement

Distribution of Approaches to Practice accross Three Stages of Training

On the basis of the information collated in the pie charts on the previous page it would appear that although the stage of training at which the students were interviewed had some bearing on their approaches to practice, the development of their practice was by no means associated only with their stage of training. An analysis of the students' accounts suggests that the rather patchy and idiosyncratic pattern of development reflected in the pie charts was closely associated with their placement experiences, the significance of which will be discussed in Chapter Eleven. In order to clarify the educational context of the material presented in the following chapters, where extracts have been drawn from the students' accounts to illustrate the three approaches the stage of training of the student concerned has been noted at the end of each extract.

5.3. The Meaning of The Typology of Approaches

As was seen in Chapter Three, it cannot be assumed that the typology of approaches to practice represents a hierarchy of performance levels, because insufficient information is available to assess the relative effectiveness of the three approaches. In Chapter Nine what infomation is available in this respect will be examined. There it will be argued that although too many questions remain to reach any firm conclusion about the relative effectiveness of the three approaches, in a more limited sense the development of a fluent approach to practice can be regarded as representing a desirable educational objective. It should be made clear here, however, that the figures presented in the preceding section of this chapter cannot be regarded as a measure of the overall success or otherwise of the course chosen as the focus of study in enabling students to develop a fluent approach to practice, because no attempt was made to secure a representative or random sample of students.

A further point which requires some discussion here in relation to the meaning of the typology of approaches to practice concerns the construction of the typology itself. As was noted earlier, it has been necessary in the interests of clarity to present a rather stereotypical picture of each approach. As a result, the lines of demarcation which have been drawn between the three approaches to practice are rather more clear cut than were the students' accounts of their work. In reality, some of the students' accounts depict a degree of movement away from the approach with which they have been included towards the next approach in the typology, while others retain vestiges of the preceding

approach. Amongst the nine accounts which have been included with the everyday social approach, for example, only the six accounts obtained from students at the beginning of training were typical of the approach. In the remaining three cases, as the students' work developed they began to move away from the everyday social approach. Equally, of the thirty three accounts which have been included with the fragmented approach only fifteen were typical of the approach. In the other seventeen cases the students had been able to resolve some, though not all, of the problems associated with the approach. In addition to this movement between the everyday social and fragmented approaches, during the course of the work they described some students were able to develop a fluent approach, having initially approached their work in a way which was more typical of the fragmented approach. Of the nine accounts which have been included with the fluent approach three were those of students whose practice had developed in this way.

Although much of the description of the three approaches to practice contained in the following chapters is based on those accounts which were most typical of each approach, the more marginal cases were also of particular interest because they revealed a great deal both about the approach with which they have been included, and about the other approach which they most closely resembled. For this reason extracts from these accounts have on occasion been used to illustrate more than one approach.

5.4. Topics Omitted In Presenting The Typology of Approaches

Three topics which were discussed in the course of the research interviews but which have been set aside either temporarily or altogether in the following chapters require some discussion here. The first concerns the approaches to practice deployed prior to training by the eleven students who were interviewed at the beginning of their course. As was seen above, while six students had deployed an everyday social approach, five had deployed a fragmented appproach. The reasons behind the differences reflected in these figures have not been discussed in the following chapters because the focus of this research was on qualifying training. It can be noted here, however, that differences in the students' approach at this stage appeared to be associated with the extent to which supervision, in-service training or agency ethos had introduced them to ways of working which differed from the ways in which

they approached their everyday social lives.

A second topic which has been set aside in the following chapters concerns the use of what might be termed role specific knowledge; that is the kind of knowledge about legal and bureaucratic procedures which was relevant within a specific agency or to a particular type of work. As Jordan (1982), amongst others, has pointed out, a great deal of social work practice is governed by legal and bureaucratic procedures, and a degree of conflict exists within the field about the extent to which this is helpful or desirable. Under these circumstances it might seem rather strange that this type of knowledge has not been mentioned in describing the three approaches to practice, and it may therefore be helpful to explain that omission here.

In fact, two themes did emerge from the students' accounts in relation to their use of role specific knowledge. As far as the first of these themes is concerned, it can be briefly noted here that the students frequently experienced a great deal of anxiety when embarking on the work they described about the procedures which should be followed. Although this anxiety contributed to some of the difficulties they described, particularly in the context of the fragmented approach, in comparison with other sources of anxiety it quickly abated. In short, it appears that the role specific knowledge required to carry out their work was relatively readily grasped, and that once grasped it was no longer a cause for acute concern. For this reason this theme has been set aside in the following chapters in order to focus on the more protracted difficulties experienced by the students.

Underlying this first theme, however, was a second theme which revolved around the influence of different policies and procedures on the students' approach to their work, and hence on the development of their practice. This theme has been only temporarily set aside in the following chapters. It will be brought back into focus in Chapter Eleven and considered there in relation to the learning milieux provided by the agencies under whose auspices the students worked.

The third topic which has not been included in describing the three approaches to practice concerns the way in which the students approached the ending of their work. This aspect of their work has not been discussed because it appears to have been associated solely with their stage of training rather than with the three approaches to practice themselves. The relevant information has,

however, been included in Chapter Ten.

5.5. The Presentation of Extracts from The Students' Accounts

In the final section of this chapter three aspects of the way in which extracts from the students' accounts have been presented in the following chapters require some discussion. The first concerns the problems involved in presenting verbatim extracts from tape recorded conversations which inevitably contain a great deal of material extraneous to the meaning of the conversation, for example the ums, ers, stumblings and repetitions which accompany ordinary speech. On the advice of those who read earlier drafts of the following chapters this extraneous material has been removed in the interests of greater clarity.

The second point concerns the way in which information emerged from the research interviews. Because the approach taken was a wide ranging, exploratory approach information relevant to a particular theme did not necessarily emerge in a straightforward sequence. Rather, in describing their work the students tended to move from topic to topic as a fresh idea or perspective occurred to them, sometimes returning to their original theme and sometimes not, in which latter case I might at a later stage have returned to explore that theme further. Equally, there were times when I interupted the students' line of thought in order to explore a particular issue further, in which case I usually returned to the original theme once that issue had been discussed. In addition, because similar questions were asked in relation to each segment of the students' work their responses to these questions often developed an earlier response. In presenting extracts to illustrate different themes it has therefore sometimes been necessary to amalgamate different segments of speech. Where this has been done the device of inserting three dots (...) has been used to indicate a break in the conversation. This same device has also been employed on occasions where I used a prompt the reproduction of which would not add to the reader's understanding and might detract from the point being made.

Finally the changes which have been made in the interests of protecting the confidentiality of the people and agencies concerned requires some mention here. As was agreed with the students, all personal names have either been substituted, or, more commonly, removed and replaced with a neutral pronoun

or noun, so that, for example, "Annette told be" might become "she told me", or "the daughter told me", depending on the need to clarify the context. Similarily, the names of placement agencies and their geographical location have been removed and replaced by generic terms, for example "the clinic", or "the team". An unanticipated problem arose, however, in relation to the students' individual patterns of speech. While both Scottish and standard English patterns were common enough to to negate any risk of identifying the students concerned, in a few cases a student's pattern of speech was so distinctively associated with a regional dialect that identification might have been possible. In order to minimise this risk standard English expressions have in a very few instances been substituted for a more colourful expression or turn of phrase. As a result of some of the changes made in presenting extracts from the students' accounts they are perhaps rather bland representations of the conversations which took place.

Summary

In this chapter a range of information has been brought together which it is hoped will assist in making sense of the typology of approaches to practice as each approach is described in detail in the following chapters. To this end the terminology used in describing the three approaches, their distribution accross the three stages of training at which the students were interviewed and the meaning of the typology have been discussed. In addition information has been provided about some topics which have been set aside or omitted in the chapters which follow, and about the way in which extracts from the students accounts have been presented to illustrate the three approaches. Once each approach has been described in the following three chapters some of the information which has been omitted there will be brought back into focus and examined in more detail in Chapters Ten and Eleven.

Chapter 6
THE EVERYDAY SOCIAL APPROACH

Introduction

The term "everyday social" was chosen to describe the approach to practice which is the focus of this chapter because in the context of this approach the knowledge on which the students drew in undertaking the work they described was derived solely from their personal, everyday social lives. While each student's stock of knowledge was in some respects highly individualistic, a number of common themes emerged. In the first section of the chapter an overview of these themes will be presented by describing the ways in which the students made sense of the situations they described and managed their interactions with the people concerned. In the following section the approach will then be described in more detail from the perspective of the ways in which the students obtained and interpreted information about the situations they described. Finally their approach to helping the people with whom they worked will be considered.

6.1. An Overview of The Everyday Social Approach

In making sense of the situations they described in the context of the everyday social approach, the students drew on two inter-related strands of knowledge: their personal values and beliefs, and their affective responses to the situations they described. In relation to the former, a common theme was their concern to adopt a stance which they described as being "non-judgemental". Their explanations suggest that this stance was typical of their approach to social life more generally and that it had been developed through their own family and other life experiences. Some students explained that values developed in this way had been reinforced by a particular political ideology, while others indicated that their religious beliefs had played an important part.

As Leighton et al. (1982) point out, a non-judgemental stance has been widely prescribed in the social work literature as a pre-requisite of good practice:

> According to most writers on the theory of social casework, the social worker should avoid 'judging' his client, ie. it is not part of the social worker's role to categorise the client as a good or bad person or to assess his virtue or vice. (p.49)

The authors go on to observe, however, that in practice it is not so easy to define what is meant by "non-judgemental", and the accounts of the students who took part in this research support that opinion. In the context of the everyday social approach the espousal of a non-judgemental stance appeared to be equated not with the avoidance of judgements, but with the espousal of positive value judgements and a concomitant rejection of negative judgements. In the course of their accounts, for example, the students often spoke of their concern to focus on the strengths of the people with whom they worked, and in keeping with that concern they referred warmly to them as likeable, interesting individuals. Their emphasis on their own positive stance was reinforced in some cases by asides in which negative judgements were attributed to others, usually other professionals, and rejected.

Intertwined with this positive value stance was an affective source of understanding which was described by some students as empathy and more figuratively by others as "putting yourself in someone else's shoes". In common with the non-judgemental approach to which the students aspired, the ability to empathise with clients has been widely associated in the literature of the profession with good social work practice. Keefe (1975, p.69), for example, notes that a capacity for empathy has been found to be an important ingredient of helping relationships in the field of counselling psychology, and goes on to develop a four-stage model of its use in social work. The four stages he describes include the accurate perception of the verbal and non-verbal cues of the other, a direct feeling response on the part of the worker, the separation of these feelings from those of the other, and the accurate feeding back to the other of an awareness of his or her feelings.

In the context of the everyday social approach, however, the term empathy appeared to refer to a more everyday fellow feeling or sympathy, on the basis of which the students arrived at conclusions about the feelings and needs of the people with whom they worked. Their accounts suggest that the development of this sense of fellow feeling was closely related to their value stance, in that it had depended initially on their identifying strengths in and growing to like the people concerned. In turn, in arriving at conclusions about the feelings and needs of the people with whom they worked, the students

drew on their own imagined response to the situations they were in and interpreted the information they obtained accordingly. In some cases their imagined response was reinforced by reference to life experiences of their own which they compared with the situations of the people with whom they worked. In contrast with Keefe's model, the students neither attempted to separate out their own feelings from those of the people with whom they worked, nor explicitly communicated them in the course of their interactions. Instead they assumed without question that their feelings were entirely consonant with those of the people with whom they worked.

Within the boundaries of this approach, then, the ways in which the students made sense of the situations they described depended on a combination of positive value judgements and sympathetic responses. It was largely through the medium of their face to face interactions with the people with whom they worked, however, that the students obtained the information on which they brought to bear these ways of making sense of situations. As a result, the process of making sense of a situation was not a matter of the straightforward development of ideas on the basis of the information available. Rather the students' accounts reveal an influential and reciprocal relationship between the process of making sense of a situation and the management of face to face interactions. On the one hand, the ways in which they interpreted information exerted an influence on the content and process of their interactions. On the other hand, their knowledge about the management of interactions exerted an equal, reciprocal influence both on what information they obtained, and on the ways in which they interpreted that information. In order to lay the groundwork for a more detailed exploration of this relationship an overview will be presented next of the knowledge on which the students based the management of their interactions.

As a corollary of their reliance in making sense of the situations they described on positive value judgements and sympathetic responses, the students' capacity to undertake the work they described depended on the development of warm, harmonious relationships with the people concerned. Accordingly, their primary concern in relation to the management of their interactions was with the climate of those interactions, and in order to create the kind of climate they wanted they drew on their knowledge about how successful social interactions are achieved and maintained. A first theme to emerge from the students' accounts in relation to this knowledge was their concern to present

themselves as likeable, friendly individuals. As one student put it: "It's just all the things you use to establish any relationship. You know, being on your best behaviour, presenting the best side of yourself". Associated with this concern about the presentation of self was a second concern that their interactions should proceed as smoothly as possible, without awkwardness or embarassment. To this end the students harnessed their knowledge about how fluent and harmonious social conversations are managed. In particular, two social conventions which govern everyday conversation were brought into play in ensuring the smooth functioning of their interactions.

The first of these conventions has been described by Goffman (1971) as "taking the line of the other". In everyday life, Goffman observes, participants typically find themselves agreeing with the views expressed by others, even if their agreement is no more than lip service. To fail to do so, he points out, is to risk loss of face for one or another of the participants, and hence potential embarassment and discomfort for all. From the students' perspective, then, the expression of agreement and sympathy with their informant's point of view was felt to be essential for the success of their interactions and for the establishment of the kind of relationships they wanted. Unsurprisingly, the avoidance of disagreement was therefore also of paramount concern.

The second conversational convention which governed the students' management of their interactions concerned the avoidance of potentially embarassing or difficult subjects matters. These subjects included issues such as sexuality and death which are generally considered taboo in the context of ordinary social discourse, as well as other issues which seemed likely to prove difficult or embarassing in a specific situation. The students' concerns about addressing such subjects emerged from their accounts either in relation to their difficulties in accomplishing particular tasks, or from their responses to questions about issues they mentioned but did not appear to have addressed. In the context of the latter line of questioning one student's explanation that the subject matters he might have addressed but didn't were "not exactly after dinner conversations", highlighted the sort of concerns involved.

In the context of this approach, then, there was a considerable degree of consonance between the knowledge on which the students drew in making sense of the situations they described and that on which they drew in managing their interactions with the people concerned. In essence, both

aspects of their knowledge were consonant with the establishment and maintenance of warm, harmonious relationships with the people with whom they worked. Underpinning those relationships was a world view informed by the students' personal values and life experiences, and by a range of norms and conventions which govern the establishment and maintenance of successful social relations. Having presented this overview, the everyday social approach will now be explored in more detail from the perspective of the ways in which the students obtained and interpreted information about the situations they described.

6.2. Obtaining and Interpreting Information

It was seen in Chapter Two that when asked to describe the role of theoretical knowledge in their practice, social workers have said that it provides "a framework" for practice. These responses would appear to suggest that in the absence of the kind of knowledge which is commonly described as theoretical such a framework would be lacking. On the contrary, the accounts of social work practice obtained in the course of this research indicate that the everyday knowledge catalogued above can equally well be described as providing a framework for practice. The framework provided was, however, an integral part of the students' ordinary, everyday ways of making sense of and acting in the social world. As such it was not described as a framework, but was taken for granted by the students on the assumption that the ways in which they understood and managed their work were the only reasonable ways of doing so. The implications for their approach to obtaining and interpreting information will be examined here along the lines of the story like structure of the research interview schedule. The initial stages of their work, up to and including their first meetings with the people concerned, will be considered first. The main themes which emerged from their responses to questions about how their work had proceeded will then be examined. Finally their responses to questions about their eventual understanding of the situations they described will be considered.

6.2.1. The initial stages of the students' work

As was seen in Chapter Four, the first area covered in the course of the research interviews concerned the students' approach to the information

available before they first met with the people with whom they worked. In some cases the students' work took place in a context where little information was available at this stage, and in these cases this line of questioning was less relevant than in others. In those cases where information was available, however, some distinct patterns emerged from the students' accounts, and these patterns were closely associated with the different approaches to practice identified in the course of the research. In the context of the everyday social approach the pattern which emerged was quite distinctive, in that none of the students concerned had considered the meaning of the information available in terms of the situation to hand, but had focussed instead on the potential for developing a warm relationship with the people concerned. In some cases their explanations suggest that they had been too concerned about whether they would be able to establish the kind of relationship they wanted to pay very much attention at all to the available information. As this student put it:

> I must admit, I wasn't really thinking about it in those terms. I was much more worried about how the visit was going to go. You know, whether I would be able to get on with him, whether there would be any awkwardness. I mean I've had cases where getting a conversation going at all has been like pulling teeth. (Beginning student)

In other cases the students had paid more attention to the information available, but their focus in interpreting that information had been on what indications it contained about the potential for establishing the kind of relationship they wanted. For example:

> In the report it said that the mother was concerned about his behaviour, so I thought if she's concerned that probably means she'll be amenable to me being there. Other than that, I remember my supervisor saying this boy's got no boundaries, but I didn't know what that meant. I suppose I should have asked, but I think I was too worried about the reception I was going to get to really pick up on it. (First placement student)

In the earliest stages of their work, then, the students' emphasis on the establishment of a warm, friendly relationship was apparent. This emphasis was echoed in their responses to questions about their aims for their inital meetings with the people with whom they worked. In describing their aims, for example, several students echoed this student's concern to focus on her client's strengths:

> I wanted to approach it with a positive attitude. I hope I'm not, I don't think I'm judgemental about clients. I like to approach things from the point of view that everyone has some strengths. I think it's very important to be non-judgemental. ... I think that comes from living in a small community where you've got to be able to get on with people from all walks of life. I suppose that's why I came on a social work course. It underpins a lot of things, more than just the way I dealt with this case. (First placement student)

When questioned further about more specific aims the students commonly spoke of their concern to be seen as likeable and friendly by the people with whom they were to work. In comparison with this aim the gathering of information was a much lower priority, as this extract illustrates:

> I had my own needs in terms of finding out things, because I was supposed to be assessing this person, but I didn't want to overdo it. I wanted to find out more about her, but at the same time I didn't want to appear incredibly nosy. I wanted to let things follow a flow, so *if* she talked about things, then we'd discuss it, but I didn't want to force it. I suppose I was concerned about how she would see me, whether she would like me or not. I mean nobody likes to be disliked. (First placement student)

This concern that information should emerge as though from ordinary conversation was widely shared. Accordingly, during their first meetings with the people with whom they worked the students' approach to obtaining information was based on the ways in which successful social conversations are managed. In response to questions about the skills on which they had drawn in eliciting information they often expressed surprise at the idea that any skill might have been involved, and the ways of obtaining information which were described consisted in being friendly, sympathetic, and encouraging. For example:

> I don't think I was using any particular skills. It's hard to think of being able to get on with an ordinary family as a skill, though I suppose it might be. To me it was just what I'd do in any situation. Just being friendly and sympathetic, that's all. (Beginning student)

and:

> I don't know if you'ld call it a skill. It's just to do with being able to get on with people. ... I suppose you pick up cues, like I always knew when he needed a bit of encouragement to go on talking. I knew when to just nod and smile and when to give him a bit more encouragement. (Beginning student)

The students' emphasis on this kind of encouraging, sympathetic approach was reflected in turn in the ways in which they interpreted the information which emerged in the course of their first meetings. In response to questions about how they had made sense of that information they commonly expressed bewilderment about the meaning of the question. From their perspective, their informants' statements were regarded as straightforward facts of the case which merited sympathy but no further exploration or interpretation. Indeed, to treat them otherwise was perceived to be tantamount to expressing disbelief or disagreement. This student's response to a question about how he had made sense of the information he obtained was not untypical:

> I'm not sure what you mean. It seemed pretty straightforward. His mother was very open about everything so there was no need to go into it in great detail or anything. She told me everything there was to tell: He was the youngest child in the family. He had two older brothers that he tended to look up to a bit. His father had died a year or so earlier. Basically she thought he was bored and a bit too easily led, and I had no reason not to believe her. (Beginning student)

6.2.2. The pattern which ensued

The students' unquestioning approach to the information they obtained in the early stages of their work was both a prelude to and a pattern for the remainder of their work. Their accounts indicate that they approached their subsequent meetings with their informants not with the aim of exploring the information already obtained, but with the intention of encouraging their informants to continue to describe their situation as they saw it and as it unfolded in the interval between meetings. An analysis of these accounts suggests that their reliance on their everyday knowledge about the social world precluded any other approach. In response to further questioning, for example, the student quoted above contrasted his approach with an alternative approach suggested by some recent learning. In doing so he revealed the extent to which his acceptance of his informant's views had been based on personal values and responses, the validity of which he had taken for granted:

> I don't think it was a logical approach at all, in the sense that when you're doing this course you might think about loss and bereavement and that kind of effect. I wouldn't have related my assessment to those kind of things. I would have related it more to everyday, unscientific, personal response. Whether I thought this lad was ok, how I felt about the family generally.

> They were just nice, ordinary people, and underneath it all he wasn't such a bad lad either. (Beginning student)

In other cases the students' unquestioning acceptance of their informants' statements had been based on an assumption that the way they felt about the situation to hand was entirely consonant with their informant's own feelings. One student, for example, explained why she had seen no reason to explore her client's stated reason for feeling depressed. As she reviewed her work, however, she considered a different interpretation and in doing so she also highlighted the assumptions on which her original ideas had been based:

> It's hard to say how I made sense of it. There wasn't anything complicated about it. She told me she was depressed because of being in hospital and I could see how that would make anyone depressed. I've never been in hospital myself, but it's not hard to imagine that it's pretty depressing, especially when you've been such an active, capable person. Though when I think about it maybe there was more to it, because when she did get home she was still depressed. That quite surprised me. Perhaps the thought of going home to a big empty house was a part of it too. (First placement student)

As a further extract from the same account demonstrates, the students' unquestioning approach could also be associated with a reluctance to address issues which might prove difficult or embarrassing:

> The more I think about it the more I think I might have missed out on that angle. It's not as if she didn't talk about living alone in the house. The thing was that when she talked about it, it was all tied in with the past, and I didn't want to dwell on that. ... She'd lived with her brother and sister until they died, and if I'm honest I don't think I had the confidence to be able to talk about bereavement and that kind of thing.

An extract from another account illustrates how a similar combination of factors had played a part in shaping a second student's approach to a different situation:

> Student: I'm not sure how I made sense of it. It was the first time I'd got involved in this kind of professional thing, where you're taking all your own values and what you would want in that situation and using that to help your client. It's just subconscious really isn't it? ... It wasn't difficult to understand him because we were so close in age. The things he talked about were the things anyone would want at his age: a job and a relationship.
>
> J.S.: We've talked quite a lot about helping him to find work.

What about relationships, was that something you looked at with him?

> Student: No, I didn't particularly want to get into that. It was already causing a lot of embarassment at work because of the way he was with the female staff, and I think it would have been much too embarassing to discuss it. ... Things to do with sexuality and that kind of thing, they're not things you generally talk about are they? (Beginning student)

Overall, the students' descriptions of their meetings with the people with whom they worked depict warm, friendly interactions which they themselves found enjoyable and satisfying. Unsurprisingly, then, they made little reference to differences of opinion with the people with whom they worked. Alongside their friendly, unquestioning approach some students did, however, reach conclusions of their own about the situations they described. One student who was quoted earlier, for example, added this observation to his account of the information he had obtained from his client's mother:

> Mind you, I thought she had a bit of a rosy view of him. She tended to blame other people for what he did. It was all the teacher's fault, or it was his pals who had led him astray. (Beginning student)

This kind of observation was presented by the students in a way which glossed over any incongruity between their own opinion and that of the people with whom they worked. Further questioning revealed that they had not followed up their observations either with the people concerned, or in interpreting the information offered, because to do so might threaten the smooth functioning of their interactions and place their relationship in jeopardy. The same student, for example, explained later why he had not taken up the question of his informant's view of her son:

> J.S.: What about what you said earlier about her view of him being a bit rosy, did that come up at all?
>
> Student: No, that never came up. I think basically things were going smoothly. They were very open and willing to work with me and I didn't want to rock the boat.

While conflicts of opinion between themselves and the people with whom they worked caused few problems for the students, they did in some cases encounter conflicts of opinion either between the people with whom they worked and other professionals, or, when they worked with groups of people

rather than with individuals, amongst the different individuals involved. Conflicts of opinion between the people with whom they worked and other professionals occurred when the professionals concerned had put forward interpretations of the information available which differed from the views expressed by the people with whom the students worked. Under these circumstances, the students did not treat the conflicting opinions they described as a cause for further exploration, but as a dilemma about whom to believe. In accordance with their emphasis on the strengths and positive characteristics of the people with whom they worked they resolved this kind of dilemma by choosing to believe their point of view. As this extract illustrates, it was in this context that they contrasted their own positive stance with negative value judgements attributed to other professionals:

> The question of alcoholism had come up earlier, actually. There'd been some query about that while he was in hospital, and I'd raised it with him then. He said he liked a drink and he didn't see anything wrong in that, which seemed fair enough to me. I think there was a tendency in the ward to stereotype people like him, the dirty old man with a drink problem sort of idea. (First placement student)

More problematic, from the students' perspective, were the conflicts of opinion they encountered amongst the people with whom they worked. The accounts of those students who had worked with groups of people rather than with individuals suggest that group interactions were in any case not easily managed in the context of the everyday social approach. As this extract illustrates, when interacting with groups the students found it hard to attend to all the people present, with the result that they tended to engage in dialogue with one person at the expense of paying attention to the views of others:

> I found it very difficult to take in everything that was going on. I wanted to be able to stop it like a video so I could look a it frame by frame. I'd find myself focussing on one person and forgetting about the others, then I'd suddenly realise I was getting totally involved with one person. (First placement student)

This kind of problem was compounded when the students encountered conflicts of opinion amongst the people concerned. In these circumstances they again felt obliged to make a decision as to whom to support in order to achieve a resolution and the restoration of harmony. By making such a decision, however, they risked jeopardising their relationship with one party or another. Nevertheless, they did take sides, and their decisions as to whom to

support appear to have been influenced by a dynamic which was associated with their position as a newcomer to the groups with whom they worked. As Douglas (1989, p.146) points out, the main concerns of the newcomer to a group are to be accepted, to do what is expected of them and to avoid offending people who have the power to hurt them. These concerns are heightened, he notes, when the group in question is a small, longstanding type of group with no formal arrangements for inducting newcomers. The type of groups with whom the students whose accounts are the focus of this chapter had worked were family groups, and from their perspective family groups appear to have been experienced as a particularly cohesive, longstanding type of group. Consequently, their concerns were those of the outsider who fears rejection, hostility and scapegoating. This student's description of her feelings about family work was echoed by other students who described this type of work:

> I don't know why family work should be so difficult. I suppose it's because they *are* a family. They know each other so well, every little nuance of the way things are said and done, and you're not a part of that. I suppose there's a fear that they could all gang up on you at once. (First placement student)

Unsurprisingly, in view of these fears, when the students encountered conflicts of opinion amongst family members, their decisions about whom to support were made on the basis of the kind of concerns described by Douglas. Most commonly the conflicts of opinion they encountered arose between parents and their children, and when faced with this situation the students invariably chose to support the parent's point of view, either because this seemed to be what was expected of them, or because from their perspective parents were more powerful than their children and to avoid offending them was therefore paramount. This student, for example, based his decision on what seemed to be expected of him:

> That meeting was the worst, I'd say. It just became a slanging match. His mother was saying it was all his fault and she couldn't cope with him any more and he was shouting at her about wanting new clothes and how his friends' parents bought them new stuff. I was sitting there in the middle of this. There didn't seem to be anything I could say which wouldn't offend one of them or the other. In the end I supported the mother, because she seemed to be looking to me as another adult to back her up. (First placement student)

In this case, on the other hand, the student's decision was based more on his concern to avoid giving offence to his client's parents:

> It was difficult because he didn't think his epilepsy should stop him looking for a job, and he'd held down a job before. His parents were worried though. They said his fits were a lot more frequent that we'd observed them to be in the unit. Some people thought they might be exaggerating his epilepsy because they would lose the attendance allowance they'd been getting since he'd been unemployed. It's a possibility but I don't believe it was true, not knowing the parents. ... The people at work said I should try to find out if it was the money that was worrying them, but I don't see how I could have done without offending them, and I didn't want to destroy the relationship I'd built up with them. (Beginning student)

6.2.3. The students' understanding of the situations they described

It will probably be clear from the preceding discussion that the students' reliance on their everyday knowledge about the social world precluded the possibility of explaining the situations they encountered in terms other than those immediately available on the basis of their informants' opinions and their own judgements as to the worth of those opinions. On the one hand, the norms and conventions of social discourse precluded any exploration of the information offered, other than by means of the kind of cues and encouragement to go on talking associated with everyday conversation. On the other hand, the students' ways of making sense of the social world were so taken for granted that further exploration or explanation seemed unnecessary. As a result, further information tended to emerge in a piecemeal fashion over time as events unfolded and were described by their informants.

The students' replies to questions about their eventual understanding of the situations they described reflect this piecemeal emergence of information. Rather than describing any overall understanding, they offered lengthy, anecdotal descriptions of personalities and events which together had the flavour of stream of consciousness accounts of the lives of the people concerned and of their own involvement in those lives. In essence, despite their concern to adopt a non-judgemental stance, their descriptions were couched in terms which portrayed the attributes and behaviour of the people concerned as good or bad, and the information obtained as right or wrong opinions. These responses are hard to document without presenting unwieldy extracts from the students' accounts, but another form of evidence is more readily presented. This emerged from their descriptions of the problems they encountered in writing case notes or summaries of their work. In the context of the everyday

social approach, the students' responses to questions about their written work reflected the problems they experienced in structuring information in ways other than those in which it came to hand. This response was one which was echoed by several of the students concerned:

> J.S.: Some students have said that they found casenotes or other written work helpful in making sense of a situation. Did it work that way for you?
>
> Student: No I don't think that helped at all. I think that's something I need to look at in the next placement. I found writing casenotes one of the hardest things. It took me hours to do them. Every interview it seemed like there was so much to put in. I tended to write a blow by blow account so I wouldn't forget anything which might be important, but I'd write reams and reams and still not get everything in. I think I'm still confused about casenotes, what you put in and what you don't. (First placement student)

In the final section of this chapter the ways in which the students attempted to help the people with whom they worked will be examined. Although this aspect of their work has been separated out in this way, it is not intended to imply that their attempts to help were in fact separate from the ways in which they obtained and interpreted information, in the sense of the sort of linear, assessment followed by intervention model sometimes prescribed. On the contrary, their attempts to help were an integral part of their approach, as will be seen in the course of the following discussion.

6.3. Helping People in The Context of The Everyday Social Approach

An analysis of the nine accounts obtained in the course of the research which were most typical of the everyday social approach suggests that, as a corollary of their unquestioning approach to the information they obtained, the students' attempts to help the people with whom they worked had depended on the extent to which the people concerned were successful in identifying and addressing their own problems or needs. When the people concerned identified specific problems or needs and suggested ways of addressing them, the students listened sympathetically and unquestioningly encouraged them to implement their ideas. In two cases this approach was unproblematic, at least from the students' perspective, because the people with whom they worked had been successful in addressing the problems they were experiencing. As the

following extracts illustrate, both students acknowledged the extent of their dependence on the people concerned:

> It all just happened really. I mean I was thinking, at seventeen would I have talked a lot about how I was really feeling. But she did. I only had to be there and she talked and talked for ages. When she started telling me that about her father I thought oh God, for her sake I hope it works out with him. But I was depending on her a lot. It worked because of her, her and the mother. They were doing it cleverly, not pushing too much one way or the other until eventually he came round. ... If I was starting again I'd try to think a bit more about different ways of doing it. I was just there really, and it worked, but I was lucky. If she hadn't been so capable I wouldn't have had a clue. (First placement student)

> I was lucky with this case. I didn't have to do anything very much because they had plenty of ideas of their own. All I did was give them a bit of encouragement. I'd have to say it was more down to them that he didn't re-offend than anything I did. If they hadn't known what to do I don't think it would have worked out so well. (Beginning student)

The other seven cases which are the focus of this discussion were very much less straightforward than those described by these two students appear to have been. In four cases problems had arisen because the people with whom the students worked had proposed ways of addressing their problems or needs but had been unsuccessful in implementing them, either because their ideas conflicted with the views of other people, or because they had been unable to carry them through. In three of these four cases the students had unquestioningly encouraged the people concerned in their approach. When problems arose, however, their own response had been limited either to some measure of withdrawal from their attempt to help, or to the kind of sympathetic response which might be made by a friend or family member. This student, for example, described how he had given up on his attempt to help when his client's parents had discouraged their son's attempt to find work:

> What should have happened really, I should have put more effort into helping him find voluntary work, but to the best of my knowledge I thought his parents would follow that up. It never occurred to me they would cop out of that. Then it seemed to lose its, it seemed to fizzle out at that point. It's a shame because for all the work I did nothing really changed. It's something I'm just becoming aware of now, that it was all unresolved, it wasn't really finished. (Beginning student)

Similarly, this student had given up on his attempt to help when his client had been unsuccessful in implementing his plan to give up drinking:

> I didn't have any experience or knowledge of that kind of drinking culture. I thought it would be a matter of straightforward steps. I didn't realise how difficult it would be for him and I don't think I gave him nearly enough support. After he'd started drinking again, I didn't know what to do. Things just drifted on and I stopped working with him after a while. (Beginning student)

This student, on the other hand, had responded as a friend might respond when difficulties arose in implementing a plan agreed with her client:

> Student: She'd said that she wanted to join the group and she seemed keen to go, but she asked me to go with her the first couple of times so I arranged to go round and pick her up. ... When I got there she was still in her night clothes. She said she didn't feel well enough to go, though there didn't seem to be anything particularly wrong with her.
>
> J.S.: What did you do when she said that?
>
> Student: Well, there wasn't much I could do. I couldn't drag her to the car and force her to go. I just told her to take some Andrews Liver Salts and go back to bed and take care of herself. ... I don't know why I said that. I suppose it's the sort of thing you'd say to a friend. I said I'd come back in a couple of days and maybe she'd feel like going then, but for a long time after that she didn't answer the door to me. (Final placement student)

The fourth case was rather different. Here the student concerned had again unquestioningly agreed with his client's mother about the best way to address the problems she was experiencing, but had been prevented by his practice teacher from doing as she wished:

> What happened was, I went round and I was there for ages. His mother told me about all the things he'd done. She didn't try to hide anything. She was saying I don't want him in the house, I want him into care. So I thought that's it then, I'll take him into care, that's what the mother wants. It wasn't until my supervisor said that wasn't on, that you have to consider the child's interests too, that I thought more about it. ... I think I'd been so relieved that she was willing to talk to me that I didn't want to, I don't mean contradict her, but you know, say anything different. (First placement student)

While this account highlights the unquestioning nature of the everyday social approach, it also suggests that the approach was one which could pose problems where statutory work was concerned. As Clark with Asquith (1985, p.36) point out, social workers are expected to balance a commitment to their clients' interests with the interests of other people and of society as a whole,

an expectation which is most clearly visible in the statutory duties required of them. The extract presented above suggests that the students' unquestioning approach to their informants' views in the context of the everyday social approach imposed limitations on their capacity to balance the different interests of all those involved. Evidence to support this view is, however, limited, because of the nine accounts of practice which depicted an everyday social approach only this account and one of the less problematic cases described earlier concerned statutory work.

In the remaining three cases which are the focus of this discussion the students' encountered problems because the people with whom they worked had not identified any specific problems or needs, but had communicated instead a more general unhappiness, loneliness or depression. In each of these three cases the students had attempted to help as a friend or family member might help, and had found themselves becoming increasingly emmeshed in their client's life. As their work progressed they found themselves spending more and more time with their client, assisting in the day to day running of their lives. This student's description of her response provides an ilustration:

> We had a fixed time for my visits but most weeks I saw him more often than that. It was no trouble because I had to go past there anyway on my way home so I could just drop in. ... I felt so sad for him, that seemed to be the basis of it. I just wished he could get something better out of life, and I felt if I could do anything at all, even if it *was* doing his washing, even if just being there was enough, I always felt why not. (Beginning student)

In the three cases where the students described this level of involvement in a client's life their remit had been to provide support for people whose needs were associated with aging or mental illness, and it might be argued that their concerned, friendly approach was not inappropriate under these circumstances. From the students' own perspective, however, their involvement in the lives of the people concerned was a disturbing, sometimes painful experience. This student's response to a question about aspects of his work which he had found particularly difficult illustrates the kind of feelings they described:

> I found leaving very difficult, my feelings about leaving. Inevitably when you see someone that much - I saw more of her than I've seen of my own family, and so it became part of my life, and I think to a certain extent those threads haven't been broken yet. ... I think if I was starting again I'd want to have more of an idea of that's you, this is me, partly in a self-preservative sort of way. I very much appreciate the time I've got now, I'm

> feeling a bit bruised, and so I'm grateful for the time, two years to actually look at the way I've been performing. (Beginning student)

Before moving on to describe the second approach to practice identified in the course of the research the main distinguishing features of the everyday social approach will be summarised.

Summary

In this chapter an approach to social work practice based solely on everyday sources of knowledge about the social world has been described. In the context of this approach the main thrust of the knowledge on which the students drew was the establishment of warm, friendly relationships with the people with whom they worked. Accordingly, in making sense of the situations they described they either unquestioningly accepted the information presented to them or, where conflicts of opinion occurred, made judgements as to the worth of the different opinions expressed which were based on their concern for the relationships they had established. Similarly, the students' approach to helping the people with whom they worked was an unquestioning approach. When the people concerned identified specific problems or needs and proposed ways of addressing them, the students encouraged them to implement their ideas without any further exploration. When the people concerned either did not identify specific problems, or experienced difficulty in addressing those they did identify, the students themselves either withdrew from their attempt to help, or responded in the way a friend or family member might respond.

Chapter 7
THE FRAGMENTED APPROACH

Introduction

In contrast with the approach described in the previous chapter, in the context of this second approach to practice the students drew on the kind of explanations which are commonly described as theoretical in making sense of the situations they described. In doing so, however, they experienced considerable problems. In the first section of this chapter an overview of the knowledge which differentiated the fragmented approach from the everyday social approach will be presented, together with an analysis of the problems experienced by the students. The approach will then be examined in more detail from the perspective of the ways in which the students obtained and interpreted information about the situations they described. In the third and final section of the chapter their approach to helping the people with whom they worked will be considered.

7.1. An Overview of The Fragmented Approach

The analysis of the thirty three accounts which depicted a fragmented approach was a daunting task, not only because they contained a large amount of material, but also because the idiosyncratic nature of much of that material presented considerable difficulties. In the early stages of the analysis these accounts seemed to depict not so much one approach to practice as a collection of approaches within which different strands in some respects ran together and in others diverged. As the analysis progressed, however, it became increasingly clear that these different strands were linked by a common theme, namely a problematic relationship between the different sources of knowledge on which the students drew in making sense of the situations they described and in managing their interactions with the people concerned.

In making sense of the situations they described the students drew on theoretical explanations which spanned the range of those put forward in the

literature for inclusion in the knowledge base of the profession. Although little would be achieved by cataloguing this knowledge in full here, it is of interest to note that some explanations occurred much more consistently in the students' accounts than others. In particular, psychodynamic explanations of human development and behaviour were amongst those most frequently mentioned, while ideas derived from a systemic perspective on family dynamics were also frequently mentioned in the context of work with children and their families. In contrast, explanations relating to group dynamics were rarely mentioned, although the students' work commonly involved them with groups of one sort or another. Similarily, behaviourism was very rarely mentioned as a source of understanding. It will be seen in the final section of this chapter, however, that behaviourist ideas were in some cases implicit in the students' approach.

In addition to these theoretical explanations, some students continued to place emphasis on their affective responses to the situations they described as a source of understanding, and their accounts of the relationship between these two sources of knowledge will be examined in the following section of this chapter. In contrast with the everyday social approach, however, in the context of this approach few students referred to their personal values as a having made a direct contribution to their understanding of the situations they described. Instead, they spoke about using theory to look behind or beyond value based responses to the people with whom they worked. As one student put it:

> I think it begins with whether you like them or not, but I know it has to go way beyond that in social work. It's something to do with looking behind that, asking why is this person the way they are. That's where the theory comes in I think, though I'm not very good at using it yet. (First placement student)

Although the students did not refer to their personal values as a direct source of understanding, this is not to suggest that they made no reference to values at all. Rather, they referred to their values in terms of principles of practice which had guided the management of their interactions. This shift in emphasis seems to have been associated more with a heightened awareness of the implications of the values they espoused for the management of their interactions than with any fundamental difference in their value stance. Rather than taking for granted the ways in which they managed their interactions, in the context of this approach the students spoke of a conscious concern to act

in accordance with the principles of practice to which they aspired.

The principles most frequently mentioned in this context included a concern to adopt a non-judgemental stance which at first seemed little different from the value stance which was associated with the everyday social approach. On closer examination, however, what the students meant by being non-judgemental in the context of the fragmented approach seemed to revolve not so much around a concern to focus on the strengths and positive characteristics of the people with whom they worked, as around a concern to allow them to describe their problems and needs in their own terms. Two further principles of practice underpinned this stance. These consisted in a concern to respect the right of the people with whom they worked to self determination, and a concomitant concern to adopt what was described as a non-directive approach. Like the non-judgemental stance to which they referred, these principles of practice have been widely espoused in the field of social work. It will be seen in the course of this discussion, however, that the students encountered problems in putting their principles into practice.

In comparison with the everyday social approach, the students' accounts also depicted a greater awareness of other ways in which they managed their interactions. It was seen in the previous chapter, for example, that in the context of the everyday social approach the students had regarded an ability to pick up cues and to encourage the people with whom they worked to describe their situations as unremarkable and ordinary. In contrast, in the context of the fragmented approach the students were very much more conscious of these abilities. Rather than taking them for granted they were regarded as skills which could be deliberately brought into play. The consonance between ways of making sense of situations and managing interactions which was a hallmark of the everyday social approach was replaced, however, by conflict.

It was through the process of trying to understand why conflicts between ways of making sense of situations and managing interactions occurred in the majority, but not all, those cases where the students referred to the kind of knowledge which is commonly described as theoretical that it became possible to draw a distinction between the fragmented approach and the fluent approach which will be described in the following chapter. The distinction drawn depends not on the content of the students' theoretical knowledge per se, in which respect there was some considerable overlap, but on the ways in

which their knowledge was used. Two definitions of the theoretical knowledge to which the students referred were developed to encompass their different approaches. While the definition which pertains to the fluent approach will be set aside for discussion in the following chapter, that pertaining to the fragmented approach requires some discussion here as a prelude to presenting an overview of the conflicts of knowledge associated with the approach.

An analysis of the students' accounts suggested that the term "ready made theory" might aptly be used to describe the theoretical knowledge on which they drew in the context of the fragmented approach, because the way in which they attempted to use this knowledge involved the direct application of preconceived explanations to the situations they described. These ready made explanations appear to have been handed on to the students largely through the medium of lectures and textbooks, although in some cases they mentioned agencies where a particular way of working was prevalent, or practice teachers who favoured a particular theoretical perspective, as the source of their knowledge. Throughout this chapter, where the term theory is used this ready made knowledge is the type of knowledge to which the term refers.

Although it is a central tenet of this thesis that the origin of the difficulties experienced by the students lay in their reliance on ready made theory, it is not intended to imply that the handing on of this type of knowledge was in itself unhelpful. On the contrary, it will be seen in the following chapter that some students were able to use ready made theory to overcome the difficulties which will be described here. The way in which they did so contrasted sharply, however, with the students' approach to the use of ready made theory in the context of the fragmented approach. In essence, in the context of this approach the students' approach to the use of their theoretical knowledge was an absolutist approach, in the sense that particular explanations for particular types of situation were regarded as mutually exclusive and as either totally correct or incorrect. This absolutist use of theory underpinned two conflicts of knowledge which were the hallmark of the fragmented approach.

The first of these conflicts arose between the students' use of ready made theory in making sense of the situations they described and their everyday knowledge about the ways in which successful social interactions are managed. Conflicts arose between these two strands of knowledge because from the students' perspective the use of theory in practice required a structured

approach to the management of interactions which conflicted with their everyday knowledge about the ways in which successful social interactions are managed. As was seen in the previous chapter, this knowledge revolved around ways of ensuring that interactions are free flowing in form and uncontroversial in content. An analysis put forward by Berger and Luckmann (1967) was helpful in shedding further light on this conflict.

In their treatise on the social construction of reality Berger and Luckmann distinguish between two sources of knowledge about acting in the social world: those of primary and secondary socialisation. The authors define primary socialisation as the process through which, as we grow up, we learn how to behave as adult members of society. Secondary socialisation, on the other hand, takes place in the context of any further educational or occupational experiences through which we learn how to behave in more specific adult roles. In the terms offered by this analysis, then, the process through which the students acquired their everyday knowledge about how social interactions are managed can be described as a process of primary socialisation. In turn the process through which they learnt about the use of theory in practice can be viewed as a process of secondary socialisation. That process was most strongly associated with their education and training, although in some cases it was also associated with their pre-training experiences of practice.

Berger and Luckmann go on to point out, however, that knowledge acquired in the process of secondary socialisation must inevitably compete with that acquired in the powerful processes of primary socialisation. Thus, from the students' perspective, their knowledge about how to use theory in practice, acquired in the course of their socialisation as social workers, was in competition with their more everyday knowledge about the management of successful social interactions, and dilemmas ensued as to which line of action should be followed. This conflict between the use of ready made theory and their everyday knowledge about the management of interactions was not, however, the only source of difficulty for the students. In addition their approach to use of ready made theory also conflicted with their interpretation of the principles of practice to which they aspired.

Clark with Asquith (1985) have highlighted the possibility of conflict between the principles of practice espoused by social workers and the theoretical knowledge to which they are introduced in the course of their education and

training. In particular, they point out, much of the knowledge encompassed within the social work curriculum consists of determinist theories which sit uneasily with the principle of client self determination. The authors also point out, however, that the right to self determination is not an absolute right. Rather, in the field of social work it may be qualified by the duties incumbent on social workers. Those duties include that of acting in a client's best interests, the definition of which may arguably depend on a professional judgement based on specialised knowledge. The difficulty faced by social workers, Clark with Asquith suggest, is in deciding where the boundary should lie.

It was in negotiating the boundary between rights and duties that many of the students who took part in this research experienced problems. It has already been seen that the students' approach to the use of ready made theory was an absolutist approach. In addition, they conceived of the right to self determination as an absolute right. As will be seen shortly, when juxtaposed these two absolutist positions led inevitably to conflict.

Taken together, the two sources of conflict described here were associated with an all or nothing approach to the use of theory in practice which emerged from the students' accounts in the form of two distinct patterns. These patterns reflected their different approaches to resolving the conflicts they encountered. In the context of one approach the students acted primarily in accordance with their everyday knowledge about how successful social interactions are managed, which had some consonance with their conceptualisation of the principles of practice to which they aspired. As a result they were able to make use of the ready made theoretical explanations to which they referred only once they were removed from their face to face interactions, with hindsight as it were. In contrast, other students deployed ready made theory as a set of recipe-like prescriptions for practice which displaced not only their everyday knowledge about the management of successful social interactions, but also the principles of practice to which they aspired.

These contrasting patterns could perhaps have been separated out and described as two distinct approaches to practice. The students' accounts suggest, however, that they were two sides of the same coin which represent two opposite but related approaches to resolving the conflicts they encountered. In fact, the separation out of the two patterns is in itself

something of an analytical device, because in some cases the students veered between them as they attempted to resolve the problems they encountered in adopting one approach or the other. Moreover, towards the end of the work they described the students' different approaches tended to converge. For these reasons both patterns have been brought together here and described as depicting a fragmented approach to practice. The two patterns will be described in more detail in the following section of this chapter from the perspective of the ways in which the students went about obtaining and interpreting information about the situations they described.

7.2. Obtaining and Interpreting Information

The students' approach to obtaining and interpreting information will be examined here under similar headings to those employed in the previous chapter. Their initial approach to the work they described, up to and including their first meetings with the people concerned, will again be examined first. The main themes which emerged from their responses to questions about how their work had proceded will then be drawn out in order to illustrate the two patterns which ensued. Finally, the implications for their understanding of the situations they described will be examined.

7.2.1. The initial stages of the students' work

As was seen in the previous chapter, in the context of the everyday social approach the students' treatment of the information available prior to their first meetings with their informants had been limited to what could be gleaned about the potential for establishing the kind of warm relationships they wanted to establish. In contrast, in the context of the fragmented approach the students placed greater emphasis both on interpreting the information available to them in terms of its meaning for the situation to hand, and on identifying lines of enquiry which might be pursued in the course of their first meetings. In interpreting the information to hand and in identifying potentially relevant lines of enquiry they drew on ready made theoretical explanations. This student's response to a question about her initial approach was not untypical:

> There was a lot of information in the file and I went through it several times. I was trying to use some of the things we'd had in the lectures so I was looking for what indications there might

> be about why he'd started offending at this stage in his life. That gave me some idea of the areas it might be useful to look at in the interview. (First placement student)

Although this approach to the information initially available was echoed by most of the students whose accounts are the focus of this discussion, their aims for their first meetings did not revolve only around the exploration of the lines of enquiry they identified. Rather, their aims had been twofold: to explore those areas they thought relevant on the basis of the theoretical explanations to which they referred, and to establish a helpful relationship with the people concerned. From the students' perspective, however, these aims were not readily compatible because their ideas about the establishment of a helpful relationship remained centred on their everyday knowledge about how successful social interactions are managed, while the exploration of the areas they thought relevant required a more structured approach.

In order to resolve this conflict of aims the students drew a distinction between their main aim for their initial meetings with their informants and their secondary aim. It was from the distinction they drew that the two patterns outlined earlier evolved. In those cases where the students deployed theory only with hindsight their main aim had been the establishment of a warm, friendly relationship. These students reported that they had hoped to concentrate on establishing such a relationship in the course of their first meeting, with the intention of introducing a more structured approach later. As this student put it:

> I wanted to kill two birds with one stone, as it were. I wanted to be clear about why I was there, and I knew there were certain areas it might be useful to explore if I could, but I also wanted to present myself as someone who was caring and genuinely concerned, a nice guy if you like. So really, for the first meeting I was prepared to see what happened. If the sort of areas I was interested in came up that was fine, but if not I was happy for it to stay at the level of introductions and getting to know each other a bit. I thought I could always go back later to get more information. (Final placement student)

Amongst those students who placed a similar emphasis on the establishment of a warm relationship several indicated that the dilemmas they faced in delineating their aims for their first meetings had been compounded by their interpretation of the principles of practice to which they aspired. To these

students the formulation of ideas and plans seemed tantamount to a judgemental, overly directive approach, as this student explained:

> I did have some ideas at that stage, because in many ways the kind of issues which seemed to be involved were familiar to me from my where I'd worked before. That's something that has worried me a lot on this placement, though. The way things were done in the team was to find out as much as you can first but I can't see how that fits with the non-judgemental attitude we're supposed to have. I wanted to get to know them a bit first rather than getting carried away with too many fancy ideas of my own. (First placement student)

In marked contrast with the hesitancy of this approach, other students indicated that their main aim for their first meetings had been the establishment of a purposeful and business like climate which they had intended to soften later. In their concern to establish this kind of climate, however, their everyday knowledge about how successful social interactions are managed was displaced. This extract provides an illustration:

> My main concern at that stage was to make sure I covered all the areas I wanted to cover. I think I had the idea that once I'd got the information I wanted, then I could concentrate on building a relationship with him. (First placement student)

When the students were required to undertake statutory duties the conflict of aims described here was compounded, because from their perspective it was not possible to present themselves both as a concerned, helpful individual and as an official representative of an agency with statutory duties to carry out. As this student put it:

> I think a lot of the problems I've had on this placement have been to do with the type of work you get in an area team. Most of the work is statutory work and that's not really the kind of social work I'm interested in. ... It's very difficult I think to convince people you're there to help when actually you're there in an official capacity. (First placement student)

In some cases the students' concerns about undertaking statutory work reinforced their emphasis on establishing a helpful relationship with the people concerned before attempting to introduce a more structured approach, since by doing so they hoped to be able to legitimate the activities they were required to carry out. In other cases, however, a statutory requirement for social work involvement compounded the students' concern to establish a business like climate in the course of their first meeting with the people concerned, since

they hoped in this way to imbue their approach with an authority they felt was otherwise lacking.

In response to questions about how their first meetings had worked out, those students whose approach was associated with the hindsight deployment of theory described meetings which were not dissimilar to those associated with the everyday social approach. Although they wanted to be clear about the purpose of their meeting, and had identified some potentially useful lines of enquiry, their primary concern had remained focussed on establishing a warm, harmonious relationship. As a result, their statement of their purpose was typically confined to a brief introduction along the lines of their name, that of the agency they represented and the immediate reason for their visit. Subsequently their initial interactions were not unlike ordinary conversations, in that they followed whatever lines their informants introduced and avoided imposing more structure in the interests of developing a warm relationship. In accordance with their initial plans some of these students left their first meetings without obtaining very much further information.

In contrast, those students who entered their initial interactions with the intention of taking a business-like, structured approach found it difficult to establish a helpful climate for their work. As this extract illustrates, in their concern to structure their interactions they found themselves unable to respond to their informants with the warmth and spontaneity they had hoped eventually to achieve:

> I spent far more time planning and preparing for that meeting than I would have before. I was trying to look at it from a family work point of view and I wanted to be very clear about what I was doing. I made a list of all the information I needed to get in my notebook so I could take it in with me. The thing was, although I could plan what *I* was going to say, I couldn't plan their responses, and that's something that has been a difficulty with other cases too, how to respond to what people say. Before I would have been much more spontaneous about it, but now I feel as if I have to think of the *right* response - what would a social worker say here, kind of thing. A good example in this case was when her father piped up during that first meeting and said did I know she was a bedwetter. I didn't know what to say. I think I just said something like oh, we don't need to go into all the details just now, but I'll make a note of it, thankyou. (First placement student)

This sort of approach was associated with a range of concerns about the presentation of self which contrasted sharply with those associated both with

the everyday social approach and with the hindsight deployment of theory. While the concerns associated with those approaches revolved around the students' desire to present and be perceived as friendly, likeable individuals, in the context of this approach the students' main concern was to be perceived as proficient social workers. This student's description of her initial contact with her client's family provides an illustration:

> I'd just begun to explain why I was there when his father butted in. He went on and on about the best way to get to the school. I was standing there smiling and nodding politely, but I kept thinking I should be getting back to the point here. I was irritated by it really, this man going on about different routes to the school when I was trying to explain why I was there. ... I was quite shaken by it. I'd been so intent on making a good impression as the new social worker, because first impressions are important I think, and they'd managed to wrap me round their little fingers before I'd even explained why I was there. (First placement student)

A second student made a connection between a similar preoccupation and her concern to use theory in practice:

> If only I'd been able to relax more. I was over anxious I think to put some of the learning from the course into practice, and part of that was this need to impress them, to demonstrate that what I was doing was really work, that I wasn't just sitting chatting idly. (First placement student)

Although the dilemmas described here have been presented from the perspective of my own analysis as a conflict between different sources of knowledge about acting in the social world, they were not necessarily experienced by the students as clear cut choices about how to approach their work. Rather, from the students' own perspective they appear to have been experienced as an acute and uncomfortable conflict between their role as ordinary, adult members of society and their role as social workers. This role conflict was highlighted by the students' responses to questions about what they felt had helped or might have helped them to resolve the problems they described. In the eyes of many students the answer lay in having a second worker present to carry the more purposeful role which appeared incompatible with the establishment of a helpful relationship. This extract illustrates the kind of solutions they proposed:

> I think the only thing that might have helped would have been to have a co-worker, someone who could bring things back to the point when they started getting off it. It's so easy to get sidetracked, and it's very hard to get back to the point without seeming rude. (First placement student)

In contrast, other students responded by suggesting that a second worker might have been able to create a helpful climate for their work while they themselves concentrated on structuring their approach. This student in fact responded by describing how she had actually relied on her colleagues to create a helpful climate for their work:

> I can probably answer that question best by telling you how I used the other members of the team. I was very aware that I used them to do all the nice nurturing bits, you know, making sure everyone is comfortable and so on. I find it difficult to be as clear as I like to be and at the same time remember all these other bits that are important too. (Beginning student)

Equally, some students described a not dissimilar displacement of one facet of their role in response to questions about what had helped them in carrying out statutory duties. In effect they had sought to legitimate their activities by disowning them, as it were, and displacing them onto the agencies under whose auspices they were working. For example:

> I think when you're doing this kind of work you've got to have the attitude that the things you are doing are not necessarily things you think are right, they're things that have to be done. You have to remember that there's a large organisation behind you which sanctions what you're doing. That's where your authority comes from, not from yourself. (Final placement student)

Other students had attempted to reinforce their statutory role by meeting with the people concerned in an office setting. As this student explained, however, this choice of setting could contribute to the rigidity of their approach:

> I think part of the problem was working in an office. A few people had said that with statutory work it's often a good idea to meet at the office, especially with teenagers because it gives you some authority. I'm not sure about that now. To me it felt very awkward, the official feel of things. It's very hard to respond naturally to people in that kind of setting. (First placement student)

As was the case with the everyday social approach, the ways in which the students approached the initial stages of their work were both a prelude to and a pattern for the remainder of their work. The main themes which emerged from their accounts in relation to the two patterns which characterised the fragmented approach will be examined here in turn.

7.2.2. The hindsight deployment of theory

Despite their intention of returning to collect information more systematically once they had established the kind of relationship they wanted with the people concerned, those students who deployed theory only with hindsight experienced difficulty in doing so. Instead, they found themselves caught up in the currents and undercurrents of their interactions, struggling to change both the direction and tone of their work. As this student put it:

> It seemed like a good idea to get a bit of a relationship going first and then see where to go from there, but that was more difficult than I thought. It was as if we'd got into this cosy relationship and it was very difficult to change that. It was almost like needing to be two different people, one a chatty, friendly person and the other a more official, social worky type. (First placement student)

The difficulties experienced by these students in changing the direction and tone of their work were associated with a range of problems which revolved around two main themes: the discussion of potentially difficult or embarrassing issues, and perceived conflicts of opinion between themselves and the people with whom they worked.

It was seen in the previous chapter that anxieties about addressing subjects which are generally considered taboo in everyday social discourse had played an influential part in shaping the everyday social approach. In the context of an approach involving the hindsight deployment of theory the part played by these anxieties was no less influential, not least because, in the light of the ready made explanations to which they referred, the students were more likely to identify difficult events in their clients' lives, or factors associated with their personal relationships, as potentially relevant lines of enquiry. In effect the taboos which surround the discussion of certain subjects in everyday life appeared to the students to preclude the possibility of discussing some of the issues they thought relevant on the basis of their theoretical knowledge. Their anxieties about raising these issues were therefore a major obstacle to the use of theory in practice. This student's description of the problem he encountered provides an illustration:

> It wasn't difficult to arrive at some sort of idea about why he might be in that situation. The problem was, how I was going to get any confirmation of whether my ideas were in any way accurate. These were very touchy subjects, and I was very dubious about raising that sort of thing with him. (First placement

student)

In some cases the students had hoped that the establishment of a warm relationship would enable their informants to raise such issues themselves:

> It was pretty clear, from the information I had, that his relationships with his mother and stepfather, that that was something I needed to explore. The thing was I felt very uncomfortable about raising such personal issues. I had the idea that once we'd established a rapport, maybe in three or four weeks time, then he would raise them himself. But he didn't, so that was wrong as well. (First placement student)

This reluctance to raise difficult issues could be compounded by the students' conceptualisation of the principles of practice to which they aspired, in that they found it difficult to reconcile taking the initiative in raising issues for discussion with the principle of client self determination. Hence, as this extract indicates, they looked to their informants for permission to discuss difficult issues:

> Looking back on it, I wonder if I should maybe have tackled the bereavment issue and the unresolved grief that seemed to be around that more than I did. But after all, she's got a right to decide what should be discussed and what shouldn't, and from the cues I was getting she was backing away from that. I'm still a bit confused about that though, whether I should have been a bit more directive there. (First placement student)

While several students echoed this concern about addressing subjects such as death or sexuality which are commonly considered taboo in the context of everyday social discourse, those students who had undertaken statutory work with children and their families indicated that their most acute anxieties had revolved around raising issues relating to parenting and child care. From their perspective, to raise these issues was to violate the rights of the parents with whom they worked. This student described how concerns of this kind had contributed to the hesitancy of her approach:

> The thing that's worried me most right throughout this placement is how much right you really have to intervene in people's lives. I mean ok, this kid has tried to set fire to things and I know you have to do something about that. But this family also have the right to conduct their family life without interference, and the very fact of my involvement was a criticism of the way they were conducting their lives, of the way they were bringing up their son. So how do you resolve that? That's what I want to know. (First placement student)

A second student's description of the difficulties she encountered in raising issues relating to the protection of a child provides an illustration of the ambivalence and hesitancy which could ensue:

> One of the things my supervisor said I needed to raise with them was the fireguard. They'd only put it up while we were there for the baby, they hadn't had it up when the little girl was in the room. ... The first time I went round on my own I was dreading it. I thought supposing they don't have it up, how on earth am I going to say this. ... I suppose it's because they're the parents. There's a feeling of what right do I have to tell these people what to do. ... Of course when I got there they didn't have it up and the little girl was playing right in front of the fire. I kept thinking I'm going to have to say something. Then she started to lean back, right into the fire. It was really dangerous because her hair is quite long and she was leaning right back into the fire. Neither of them reacted at all, they were just sitting there nice and relaxed while I was getting more and more anxious. In the end I leaned forward and kind of put my arm around her shoulders and moved her away. ... I think I said something like "you really should put the fireguard up", but they didn't take much notice. (Final placement student)

As in the context of the everyday social approach, then, in the context of this approach the students experienced difficulties in undertaking statutory work which revolved around the problem of balancing the needs and interests of those involved. Interwoven with their concern about raising difficult issues for discussion was a second concern which compounded this problem, namely that the development of their own ideas constituted a conflict of opinion with the people concerned.

It was seen in the previous chapter that in the context of the everyday social approach conflicts of opinion between the students and the people with whom they worked had not posed problems. The students had, however, spoken of conflicts of opinion between the people with whom they worked and other professionals. These conflicts had arisen when the professionals concerned had interpreted information in ways other than those in which it was presented by the students' informants. Similarly, in the context of this approach when the students themselves interpreted information in ways other than that in which it was presented, that is in terms of the theoretical explanations on which they drew, they regarded this as tantamount to disagreeing with their informant's views. As a result their reluctance to expose their own lines of thought was greatly reinforced, since to do so seemed likely to jeopardise their relationship with the people concerned. Some students felt in addition that by exposing

their own ideas they might exacerbate an already difficult or painful situation. For example:

> I was trying to use some of the things we'd had in human development, and from that point of view I was pretty sure her mother's remarriage had a lot to do with it. The problem was what to do with that. It was all very well for me to have all these theories but she wasn't going to see it like that. And anyway, if it was true I didn't want to rub it in by talking about it all the time. (First placement student)

Other students equated the expression of their own ideas with a judgemental attitude:

> I'm not sure I did make sense of it. What I did reach was a way of describing the situation which I felt I could present to my client. My main concern was not to appear overly judgemental. What I did was to describe her situation in very material terms which didn't contradict the things she'd told me. My ideas about why she might be in that situation I kept to myself. (Final placement student)

The way in which some students accounted for the difficulties they experienced in expressing ideas based on the theoretical explanations to which they referred reveal an interesting aspect of the relationship between their use of theory and more everyday sources of understanding. As in the context of the everyday social approach, those students who deployed theory only with hindsight in the context of the fragmented approach placed emphasis on the importance of their affective responses, in addition to their theoretical knowledge, as a source of information about the feelings and needs of the people with whom they worked. When describing their use of these two sources of knowledge they often spoke of resonances between the two. This student, for example, drew a comparison between the notion of scapegoating, which she associated with her education and training, and her own more everyday understanding of group processes:

> I'm not sure how different my ideas would have been before the course. I might not have called it scapegoating, that's probably come from the lectures, but I would have known she was being treated unfairly. I mean we've all had experiences of being in groups where that happens. Like at school, there were always kids who got all the stick, I think everyone is aware of that. Even when I was a kid I knew that was unfair, and I think without calling it scapegoating I would have had a lot of sympathy for the position she was in. (First placement student)

In the earlier stages of their education and training some students spoke of the

discovery of this sort of resonance between theory and their more everyday knowledge with considerable enthusiasm and excitement. As one student put it: "I was over the moon! It felt like I really knew something instead of being just a dumb first year". As they progressed through training, however, unless they were able to overcome the difficulties they experienced in structuring their face to face interactions, the students lost this sense of discovery and excitement. Instead they began to question the value of using theory at all, and they used resonances between theory and their more everyday knowledge in order to legitimate an unstructured, atheoretical approach. This student's response to a question about the way in which she had made sense of the information she obtained provides an illustration:

> I'd have to say it was based more on gut feeling than theory. I know courses have to teach theory, but I'm not sure you need to use theory in practice as much as they say you should. I mean you don't need theories of human development to know that your parents' divorce is a very significant event and I don't see why something is more valid just because someone has written it in a book. I think what the theory does is to tell you when you're on the right lines. Like in this case, it made me more aware of the sort of things that might upset her, so I could be careful to avoid those things, but I don't really think it changed the way I made sense of it. (First placement student)

In some cases the role these students attributed to theory vis a vis their more everyday knowledge was restricted to a way of legitimating an unstructured, atheoretical approach only to those in whose eyes a theoretical account was necessary. As this extract illustrates, this kind of legitimation was most commonly employed in meeting course requirements:

> I know I said in the dissertation that I was using systems theory, but if I'm honest I'd have to say that that was more just to be able to put some theory in. I'm not sure that you really need to refer to theory when you're actually working. It's hard to put a value on it, but I would say that in this case I drew more on my own knowledge of tensions in families and of what it's like to be a disappointment to your family than on any particular theory. It wasn't hard for me to imagine what it was like for her to be in that situation. I mean that might be developed by the lectures on family work, but I don't think you necessarily need that kind of explicit framework. There are some very commonsense understandings of these things. (Final placement student)

The accounts in question indicate that this kind of legitimation of an unstructured, atheoretical approach was part of a vicious circle in which the students became emmeshed. On the one hand, they were able to account for

their difficulties in structuring their interactions by questioning the need to make use of theory in practice. On the other hand, those same difficulties, which have been seen to stem from a conflict between the norms and conventions of social discourse and the introduction of a more structured approach, also prevented them from making their more everyday understandings explicit. Hence, as in the context of the everyday social approach, their affective responses remained at the level of unchecked assumptions about the feelings and needs of the people with whom they worked. A second extract from the account quoted above provides an illustration:

> J.S.: Was that something you discussed at all with her, the tensions in her own family?
>
> Student: No, we never directly discussed it, though it was there in the background. There was never any opportunity to discuss it actually. She didn't bring it up herself, and I was dubious about getting into that kind of area unless she raised it herself. ... It's only speculation, but my hunch would be that there were some pretty sensitive issues there, and I was very wary of raising those issues with her.

When the students attempted to deploy ready made theory as recipes for practice the problems they experienced were quite different from those which have been described here. The main themes which emerged from their accounts will be contrasted with those associated with the hindsight deployment of theory.

7.2.3. The deployment of theory as recipes for practice

When the students persisted in deploying theory as recipes for practice they continued to experience difficulty in creating a helpful climate for their work. In effect, their capacity to elicit and explore the views of the people with whom they worked was impeded by their concern with purpose and structure. Moreover, in contrast with the hesitancy expressed by other students about pre-judging a situation or being overly directive, these students found themselves neglecting the principles of practice to which they aspired. This student's response to a question about how her meetings with her client had worked out provides an illustration:

> I'm so embarassed about it now. I had the idea that if I

> started off very structured I would be able to relax a bit more later. It didn't work out like that though. That first meeting was the pattern, really, for several meetings. I'd go through my notes of the last one and draw up an agenda for the next one. I'm so ashamed of myself. It wasn't until about half way through the placement that I realised I was so concerned with what *I* wanted to do that I hadn't left any room to find out what he might want. (First placement student)

In some cases the students were so dismayed at the results of their attempts to make use of theory in practice that they abandoned this approach and veered towards the pattern associated with the hindsight deployment of theory. Other students, however, redoubled their efforts. They attributed their failure to manage their interactions successfully to insufficient planning and returned to subsequent meetings with the aim of exerting greater control over their format and content. For example:

> I got very disheartened with it all. No matter what I did I couldn't seem to get any control in the interviews. I had a look at some of the literature on family work but all the books seem to assume that people want to work with you. They don't tell you what to do when all you get is grunts and monosyllabic answers. The idea of circular questioning was something I thought I could try though. I decided to use that the next time I saw them, so I sat down and wrote out a list of about forty questions to ask. ... I'm not sure how well it worked. A lot of the time they just answered in monosyllables. It felt a bit like an interrogation. I was pleased that I'd managed to get through everything I wanted to ask, because at least I'd managed to get some control of it, and I think they did respect me a bit more after that. But when I looked at my notes afterwards, I didn't really get much information from them. (First placement student)

Like this student, other students who attempted to deploy theory as recipes for practice reported that their approach had resulted in an interrogatory feel to their interactions which contrasted sharply with the concern associated with a more everyday approach that information should emerge as though from ordinary conversation. They often said that they had felt rigid or robotic, as though playing an unaccustomed role. Some students highlighted this sense of inauthenticity by referring to a more everyday, conversational approach as one of "being myself". The student quoted above, for example, describing her next meeting with her client's family, added as an aside that she had "stopped circular questioning by then" and was "being more myself."

As has been seen, when the students deployed theory only with hindsight, the problems they experienced in raising issues for discussion had contributed to

the hesitancy of their approach. In the context of this approach the problems associated with raising issues for discussion were rather different. Here, the students' concerns did not revolve around the legitimacy of raising issues they thought relevant, because from their perspective the exploration of lines of enquiry formulated on the basis of a theoretical explanation provided sufficient legitimation for doing so. Hence, not only was their everyday knowledge about the management of interactions displaced by their use of ready made theory, but the potential for conflicts of opinion was also glossed over. This students' assessment of her approach provides an illustration:

> As I said earlier, I was over anxious to put some of the learning from the course into practice, and in that sense it was a very head thing. There wasn't a lot of feeling. It seems so obvious now, but at the time it was as if I forgot to put myself, even for a minute, in their shoes, especially Stuart himself. I think that's *why* I let myself rush in with my airy fairy notions when I had been so determined to be calm and considered about it. If only I'd taken a bit of time to get to know him better, to look at it through his eyes a bit more. That's something I've struggled with in more than one case, how you can use theory, which I think is important, without forgetting the feelings side of things. (First placement student)

Although it is not possible to know with any certainty how the students' approach to raising issues they thought relevant was perceived, from their own perspective the people with whom they worked rarely responded as they expected to their overtures. For example:

> Student: I was trying to look at it in terms of some of the things we'd had in the human development lectures, and I mean when you looked at it like that he'd had so many losses in his life. I felt sure the way he was in hospital was connected with that, so for me that suggested that some kind of counselling was what was required. The trouble was, he just wasn't able to respond to that. He wasn't interested in talking about his past.
>
> J.S.: How did you approach it with him, can you remember?
>
> Student: Well, I don't think I put it quite as directly as that. I may have said something like perhaps if we look at some of the things that have happened in the past, that might help. I just assumed that if we could talk about those things, then he would gain some sort of insight. (First placement student)

When the people with whom they worked did respond to their overtures, further problems ensued from the rigidity of the students' approach. This student's description of the problems she encountered was one which was echoed by several other students:

> It all seemed very clear in the books. The problem was, how do you put that into practice? The literature was helpful as far as it went, but it's what you do when someone starts telling you all these terribly painful things. I seemed to freeze up at that point. I was so worried about saying the wrong thing that I didn't know what to say, and nobody seemed able to tell me. (Beginning student)

The problems encountered by the students in obtaining and interpreting information were reflected in their responses to questions about their eventual understanding of the situations they described. These responses will be examined here next before moving on to the final section of the chapter.

7.2.4. The students' understanding of the situations they described

It will be clear from the preceding discussion that in the context of this approach the students' understandings of the situations they described were not couched only in the terms in which information was obtained. Instead, regardless of which pattern their work followed, in responding to questions about their eventual understanding they referred to the theoretical explanations on which they had drawn in interpreting information. As in the context of the everyday social approach, however, the students' experienced difficulty in arriving at an overall understanding of the situations they described. The problems associated with the two patterns which have been described here will be considered in turn.

The hindsight deployment of theory

In the context of an approach involving the hindsight deployment of theory the students were only able to focus on making sense of the information they obtained in the light of the theoretical explanations to which they referred once they were removed from the pressures of their face to face interactions. When face to face with the people with whom they worked their approach was not dissimilar to that described in the previous chapter, in that they accepted the information offered as facts of the case which required no further exploration. This student's description of the problems she encountered provides an illustration:

> That's something that worries me a bit, that I'm not able to think about things as they're happening. When I'm with my clients I feel a bit like a sponge: I'm soaking it all in but I can't do

> anything with it. I sit there nodding and smiling and trying to look sympathetic but inside it's a panicky feeling - what on earth does all this mean kind of thing. It's only when I'm on the bus or back in the office that I can really think about what they were saying and all the other things that were going on. That's where the theory comes in, but I can't seem to use it at the time. It's still based on gut reaction rather than theory. (First placement student)

As in the context of the everyday social approach the problems experienced by the students in making sense of the information they obtained were compounded when they worked with groups of people, and particularly when they encountered differences of opinion amongst the people concerned. Rather than taking sides, however, in the context of this approach the students drew on their theoretical knowledge in an attempt to make sense of the conflicts they encountered. Again, though, they were only able to do so after the event. When face to face with the people with whom they worked they remained unsure about how to respond. As a result their role was usually that of a silent, uncomfortable observer. Once removed from the immediacy of their face to face interactions, however, they were able to begin to make sense of the conflicts they had witnessed, albeit too late to guide their own response. This student described both his immediate response to a family dispute, and the way in which he had later made sense of that dispute:

> I'm aware that I find that very difficult, when people are arguing, and this instance was fairly typical. It was like being paralysed. I just left in the end. I think I said something ineffectual like perhaps we can talk about this again next week. Later, once I'd got back to the office, I could see it wasn't as catastrophic as it had felt. In many ways I learnt more about the family from that argument than from all the other meetings. I could see lots of things it might have been useful to follow up. So that was a missed opportunity, a chance to strike while the iron was hot that I completely missed. (First placement student)

Although these students were able, then, to reflect after the event on the information they obtained, they remained unable to explore the lines of thought which emerged in the course of their face to face interactions, because to do so conflicted with their ideas about the maintenance of a helpful relationship. Instead, when face to face with their informants they continued to absorb information as events unfolded, while giving little or no indication of the direction their own thoughts were taking. As a result, their accounts of their eventual understanding of the situations they described had a tentative, almost

ruminative tone about them. In contrast with the everyday social approach, they did not present their informants' views as straightforward facts of the case. Rather, they supplemented those views with their own speculative lines of thought for which they could present some argument but little confirmation. As in the previous chapter, it is difficult to illustrate the students' responses to questions about their eventual understanding without including long, unwieldy extracts from their accounts. Here again, however, their responses to questions about their written work provide some indication of the problems they encountered. This response was fairly typical:

> I'm not sure that writing casenotes was much help really. For one thing, I was aware that other people would be reading them, and I didn't want to make too many judgements. So much of my thinking about the case was no more than that, my own opinions, and I was very wary of putting that on paper. I tended just to put down the obvious things, facts about the family and the things that happened. The trouble was so much happened that it was hard to know where to start. I tended to write far too much I think, just to get everything down. (Final placement student)

The deployment of theory as recipes for practice

When the students attempted to deploy theory as recipes for practice, their responses to questions about their eventual understanding of the situations they described were rather different. As has been seen, the majority of students who took this approach had interpreted the information they obtained in terms of ready made theoretical explanations acquired in the course of their education and training. In contrast with other students, however, they had taken the validity of this ready made knowledge for granted. From their perspective, explanations derived from different theoretical frameworks were applicable in rule-book fashion to different kinds of situation. Where work with children and families was concerned a systemic explanation was regarded as the explanation of choice and other explanations were ruled out. On the other hand, where work with an individual was concerned this kind of explanation was considered inappropriate and a psychodynamic explanation was usually chosen. Thus the students' choice of explanation was influenced more by the configuration of people with whom they worked than by an analysis of their situation per se. In a few cases, however, their choice of explanation was made not on this basis, but because a particular way of thinking about situations was familiar to them from previous experiences of practice. In these cases the students had

assumed that their familiar approach to making sense of a situation was appropriate for the new situations they encountered in the course of their education and training.

Whatever the basis of their choice of explanation, the students' approach to making sense of information was not very different in many respects from that associated with the everyday social approach, despite considerable differences in the content of the knowledge on which they drew. While they did not take the information they obtained at face value as straightforward facts of the case, there was nevertheless a taken for granted quality about their approach, in that they immediately assimilated the information they obtained to their own pre-selected explanations. From that point on those explanations were taken for granted as facts of the case which required no further exploration. Instead of exploring or seeking confirmation of the validity of their ideas, the students proceded straight away to implement the kind of intervention which seemed, rule book fashion, to fit. Consequently, as in the context of other approaches, their ideas remained at the level of unchecked assumptions.

Because this pattern was closely associated with the ways in which the students attempted to help the people with whom they worked it will be explored more fully in the final section of this chapter. Of interest here, however, is the fact that in common with other students these students experienced difficulty in arriving at an overall understanding of the situations they described, in this case because the interventions they attempted did not meet with the expected results. Having failed to achieve the expected results the students decided that their initial choice of theoretical explanation was untenable and quickly replaced it with another recipe like formula. Whatever their second choice, however, they rarely met with success in achieving the results they expected, and eventually fell back on more everyday explanations of the situations they described. The processes involved will be explored more fully shortly. In the meantime this extract offers an indication of the implications for the students' ability to arrive at an understanding of the situations they described:

> A lot of the work I've done on this placement has been with families and children, and my practice teacher is very keen on systems theory so I've been trying to use that a lot. The trouble is, as I found out in this case it isn't always that useful. By about the third meeting, I was convinced that a lot of the little girl's behaviour was functional, though I still didn't know what the dynamics were. It stayed at that level for a long time, and I still

> don't think I've got the measure of them. ... I gave up on the systems theory because they just couldn't see it that way. I thought a more task centred approach might work better, though I was still convinced her behaviour was functional. But there again they didn't do any of the things they were supposed to. I found it very difficult to make a lot of sense of what was going on. In the end, my feeling about it was that they needed a granny, someone to be around and help with the hassle of being adults and parents. (Final placement student)

The different problems encountered by these students in making use of theory in practice were associated with accounts of their eventual understanding which were constructed differently from those associated with the hindsight deployment of theory. In place of the tentative, ruminative accounts associated with that approach, in the context of this approach the students' accounts had an episodic, disjointed quality. An illustration is provided by their response to the story-like framework of the research interview schedule, in that they found it difficult to think of their work in terms of a beginning, middle and end. From their perspective their work seemed to have a multitude of beginnings, as one theory was replaced by another. As one student put it: "It's difficult to say when the work really began. I always seemed to be beginning and never getting anywhere." Again the students' responses to questions about their written work reflect the problems they encountered in arriving at a more cohesive understanding. This student's description of her casenotes was not untypical:

> The casenotes? Do I have to be honest? I'm pretty ashamed of them now. I started off alright, as I thought, with nice clear headings about assessment, goals and interventions, but as it went on they just dissolved into a mess. There were lots of times I wished I could tear them up and start again. It was very hard to keep up with what was happening and none of my fancy ideas ever came to much. The worst part about it was when it came to writing a summary. I thought where on earth do I start with this lot. (First placement student)

As in the context of the everyday social approach, the ways in which the students attempted to help the people with whom they worked were closely interwoven with the ways in which they obtained and interpreted information. This aspect of their work will now be considered in the final section of this chapter.

7.3. Helping People in The Context of The Fragmented Approach

In order to explore the ways in which the students attempted to help the people with whom they worked in the context of the two approaches described above, the following discussion will focus on the fifteen accounts of practice which were most typical of the fragmented approach. As will be seen in the following chapter, when the students were able to resolve some of the conflicts and dilemmas described here a different pattern emerged. Amongst the fifteen accounts which will be considered nine were typical of the hindsight deployment of theory, while six were typical of the deployment of theory as recipes for practice. The different approaches to helping people associated with each of these patterns will be considered in turn.

The hindsight deployment of theory

When the students deployed theory only with hindsight in the context of the fragmented approach the ways in which they attempted to help the people with whom they worked were not dissimilar in some respects to those associated with the everyday social approach. Here too, as a result of their reluctance to introduce their own lines of enquiry and thought, they were dependent to a large extent on the ideas and initiatives of the people with whom they worked. Underlying this similarity, however, were some rather different themes which will be examined here.

In three cases the students whose accounts are the focus of this discussion had experienced considerable problems because they had been unable to establish the kind of relationship they wanted with the people with whom they worked. Under these circumstances, their efforts were centred on endeavouring to establish a relationship rather than on more directly attempting to help the people concerned. While their inability to establish the kind of relationship they wanted may have been the result of variables not addressed by the research, for example the background characteristics of the people involved or unknown factors associated with their particular situations, the students' accounts suggest that it was associated to some extent at least with the ambivalence of their own approach. Although they wanted to establish the kind of warm, friendly relationship associated with the everyday social approach, these students appear to have been unable to approach the people with whom they worked in an unequivocally warm, friendly way

because, as has been seen, this kind of approach was perceived to conflict with their secondary aim of adopting a more structured way of working. As this extract from one of the accounts in question illustrates, the relationships they did describe reflected their ambivalence:

> The most difficult thing was the frustration I think. I'd pinned all my hopes on being able to get a good relationship with her, especially because that was something the field social worker hadn't been able to do, but it didn't work out. ... I think it was just because it was a very difficult role. I wanted to be a friend to her, someone she could come and talk to, but at the same time I was her keyworker and I needed to be able to work with her on that level too. Maybe it's possible to get some sort of balance, but I didn't manage it. I was worried that she would see me as too friendly and easy going, but I didn't want to bore her either by always talking about heavy things. (First placement student)

Faced with their inability to establish the kind of relationship they wanted, both this student and another student eventually gave up on their attempt to do so, and hence on their attempt to help. This extract from the account of the second student provides an illustration:

> One of the things was the worry about not having much to offer in terms of shared interests or common ground. I think if I could start again I would wrack my brains for something we could do together. I think perhaps there was a lack of confidence that we could enjoy something together or make progress in that way. There was a dread of planning enjoyment when so much of it depends on spontaneity. I suppose in the end I didn't want to really. That's what it boils down to. (First placement student)

Although the third student's experience was rather different his account lends support to the idea that the ambivalence of the students' approach had contributed to the problems they described. In this case, rather than abandoning his attempt to establish the kind of relationship he wanted, and hence his attempt to help, the student abandoned his secondary aim of adopting a more structured way of working in favour of a more everyday approach. In doing so he found that he was able to establish the kind of relationship he wanted with his client, and that his client was subsequently able to identify and address some concerns:

> One of the biggest problems with this case was that he was hardly ever there for our appointments, and when he was he was uncommunicative to say the least. After he went missing from the home for the third time I thought I'm not carrying on like this. It felt dishonest, all this investigating and theorising behind

> his back. I decided for the rest of the placement that I was just going to be a friend to him, and that's what I did. We went out for a pint or a coffee and enjoyed ourselves. It was during one of those outings that he finally told me where he'd been going. After that things improved a great deal. He began to talk about some of the things that were concerning him, and he began to suggest other things we could do in our time together, like finding his wife's grave. That was something that had been on his mind. (First placement student)

There are, then, some indications here that the students' conflicting aims in approaching their work in some cases diminished tneir capacity to offer the kind of warm, friendly relationship they wanted to offer, and hence their ability to help the people with whom they worked.

In three of the remaining six cases under consideration here the people with whom the students worked had identified some specific needs or problems, but had been unsuccessful in addressing them. Under these circumstances, as in the context of an everyday social aproach, the students were also at a loss as to how to help, in this case because the kind of interventions which seemed appropriate on the basis of their own lines of thought appeared to conflict both with their informant's views, and with their own ideas about the creation of a helpful climate for their work. In the context of this approach, however, the students' approach was different from that described in the previous chapter, in that they neither withdrew from their attempt to help, nor responded in the way a friend or family member might respond. Instead they continued to meet with the people concerned on a regular, planned basis. In the course of their meetings they encouraged them to talk about how things had been between meetings and offered sympathy and general support in times of crisis. At the same time, once removed from the pressures of their face to face interactions, they struggled to obtain an understanding of the situation within which they were working.

In the absence of any information about the views of the people with whom the students worked it is not possible to draw any conclusions about the extent to which their persistence and concern was perceived to be helpful. From the students' perspective, however, their time and effort had resulted in little or no change, and although they hoped their involvement might have made some less visible difference, they also expressed frustration and concern about their inability to offer any more concrete help. For example:

> I only saw them for an hour or two at the most each week,

> but I worried about them twenty four hours a day. I even dreamt about them. I always had the feeling I wasn't doing enough and yet there didn't seem to be anything else I could do. (First placement student)

In the remaining three cases the students' approach was rather different from those described so far, in that they themselves had proposed ways of addressing needs or problems identified by the people with whom they worked. In all three cases, however, the students expressed some dissatisfaction with the ideas they put forward. In two cases their dissatisfaction stemmed from their feeling that their ideas were only stop gap measures which, though apparently successful in the short term, did not address what they themselves saw as the most important issues. In both cases the students indicated that their ideas had been based less on their theoretical knowledge than on more everyday sources of knowledge, which they had later reframed in the terminology of a task centred approach, in much the same way as theoretical explanations were used to legitimate an unstructured approach to obtaining and interpreting information. This student's response to a question about how her work had ended up provides an illustration:

> I don't know if it was because it was getting near the end of the placement and I thought I had to do *something* before I left, but anyway I had the idea in that meeting of asking them to think of something the other one could do which might make things better for them. Her mother said the only thing she wanted was for Tracey to go to school every day, and I thought this is us back where we started. But then Tracey said she would go to school if her mother kept her supplied with cigarettes. That was what she wanted. For the essay I said it was a task centred approach, but it was more like bribery really. It's the sort of thing I've seen my sister do to get my wee nephew to do things he doesn't want to do. Amazingly, so far it seems to have worked. Last time I went round she'd been to school every day for a week. I can't see it lasting though. I'm pretty sure there's a lot more going on in the family, especially between her and the step-father. There's a lot of things in that relationship which make me wonder about sexual abuse, but that's something I don't think I could possibly have tackled. I just hope the next worker will be more able to look at that than I was. (First placement student)

In the third case the student concerned had been able to negotiate childcare provision for his client, and he was pleased to have been able to help in this way. He remained dissatisfied, however, with a second idea he had proposed. In this case his dissatisfaction stemmed from his subsequent realisation that this

idea in fact conflicted with his own lines of thought:

> I was really pleased when the children's centre offered her a place. At least I'd done something useful for her there. It was only for a few hours each day though, so there was still the question of some support in the evenings and at weekends. The natural solution seemed to be for the grandparents to have her when her mum couldn't cope, and my client didn't raise any objections. In some ways though I'm a bit dubious. I mean I don't think this young woman is in the situation she's in for no reason at all, and from what I've seen of her relationship with her parents I could build up quite a list of indications that she may have been sexually abused by her father. On the other hand, if sexual abuse was a problem, no-one was saying so. All the same I was worried about encouraging her to leave the little girl with them. I wonder now if I shouldn't have explored that more, though having said that I'm not at all sure I could have. (Final placement student)

The deployment of theory as recipes for practice

In comparison with the variety of approaches associated with the hindsight deployment of theory, when the students deployed theory as recipes for practice their approach to helping the people with whom they worked was very much more uniform. From the six accounts which were most typical of this approach a strikingly similar pattern emerged which was closely interwoven with the process of interpreting information described earlier. There it was seen that in the majority of cases the students took for granted the validity of ready made theories derived mainly from lectures or textbooks and proceded directly to implement the kind of interventions which seemed, rule book fashion, to fit.

From the perspective of these students, then, the use of a particular theoretical explanation in interpreting information appeared to dictate the kind of help required. As a result their choice of intervention was made not on the basis of an analysis of a particular situation, but on a generic equation of certain situations with particular theories and the methods of intervention associated with them. Thus, where their meetings took place with an individual, and a psychodynamic explanation was the explanation of choice, the deployment of that explanation appeared to the students to require the exploration of past events in the lives of the people with whom they worked and the subsequent acquisition of insight into the present significance of those events on the part of the people concerned. Similarly, when they worked with children and their families the deployment of a systemic perspective appeared to require the

cooperation and presence of all family members in order that their inter-relationships might be explored and changes in family functioning engineered. In a few cases, as was seen earlier, the students' choice of explanation had been made not so much on the basis of this rule book approach as on the basis of their familiarity with a particular way of thinking about situations. Hence in these cases their choice of intervention was also made on the basis of their familiarity with particular ways of working.

Clearly, in comparison with other students these students were very much less dependent on the ideas and initiatives of the people with whom they worked. They were, however, dependent instead on the motivation and ability of the people concerned to cooperate, with a minimum of explanation, in the kind of interventions which seemed, recipe fashion, to fit their situation. Although it is not possible to know with any certainty how the students' attempts at intervention were perceived, from their own perspective the people with whom they worked had, without exception, been either unable or unwilling to cooperate in their first choice of intervention. In these circumstances, as was noted earlier, the students quickly abandoned both their first choice of theory and the type of intervention with which it was associated. At this stage, the accounts of those students who had deployed a particular theory on the basis of its familiarity converged with those of other students. This student, for example, explained why she had abandoned her familiar way of working:

> For a while I got very stuck. Right from my time as a volunteer and in all the jobs I've had that's been the approach, that you try and help people gain insight by helping them to talk things through. But I couldn't get anywhere with that approach because he just wasn't interested in talking about the past. (First placement student)

In the context of family work some students came up against problems because they were unable to secure the participation of all those whose presence they felt was necessary for the deployment of a systemic perspective. This extract provides an illustration:

> I was convinced that the problems didn't begin and end with this child's behaviour. I was pretty clear about that. Where it got less clear was what to do about that. I wanted to look at it with them in a systemic sort of way, but after that first meeting her dad was never in, though I kept stressing that it was really important for them all to be there. There wasn't much point in keeping going with it if he wasn't going to be there. (First placement student)

Other students who attempted to deploy a systemic perspective had been able to secure the presence of all those they thought should be involved, but had nevertheless found themselves unable to pursue the sort of intervention they thought appropriate because the people concerned seemed unwilling or unable to share their perspective. For example:

> I'd been trying to use a systemic kind of approach, because I thought if I focussed on the little girl's behaviour that would feed into what they were doing. The trouble was they didn't see it that way at all. They kept bringing everything back to her behaviour so in the end I just gave up. (Final placement student)

Having failed to achieve the results they expected with their first choice of intervention, the students turned to other methods. Their second choice of intervention was often described as a task centred approach, although they rarely referred to the behaviourist ideas which underpin that approach. Instead, the techniques associated with the approach were implemented rule book fashion, on the assumption that the desired results would ensue. It was for this reason that behaviourist ideas were described at the beginning of this chapter as implicit in some students' work.

In deploying a task centred approach, the students unquestioningly accepted their informants' definitions of the problems they confronted and translated those problems directly into goals, contracts and associated tasks. With one exception, however, the expected results again failed to ensue. Although it is not possible to be certain why this was so, the students' accounts suggest that their approach left little space for any exploration of the complexities of some of the situations they encountered, and particularly of the different perspectives which might be held by those involved. This extract provides an illustration:

> Although my own inclination is towards a more therapeutic approach, there was no way they were going to be able to make use of that. I decided what I needed to do was to get back to something very simple and clear, and the task centred approach seemed ideal for that. His mother was very clear about what the problems were, so it seemed fairly straightforward to turn those things into tasks they could work on over the next week or so. She was happy with that, and I was pleased that I seemed to have found a way through the impasse I'd got myself into. When I went back next week though, nothing had changed. If anything he was even more withdrawn and his mother was even more frustrated. It seems obvious to me now, what I'd done was to completely miss out his point of view. I mean I can see how to him it must have felt like more of the same, only now there was another person nagging at him. (First placement student)

In the one case where an attempt to deploy a task centred approach had achieved the expected results the question of different perspectives had not arisen, because the student's intervention had involved only her client himself. At a later stage in her work, however, the same student attempted to use the approach again in a context where different perspectives were involved, and her second attempt met with little success:

> I think I assumed that because it worked once, it would work again. It was like having a magic formula: you set goals, make a contract, and hey presto! When it didn't work I was completely thrown. It wasn't until I sat down to write the essay that I was able to look at that more closely. I think what I'd done was I hadn't taken into account the fact that they might all have different goals. I assumed that because they agreed at the meeting, that meant they really agreed. I think now I could have spent a lot more time looking at what they were wanting to change and what they were getting out of things staying the same. It was a lot less straightforward than I imagined. (First placement student)

In the context of work with children and their families the second choice of intervention made by two students was to work individually with different family members. In both cases the students' decision had been prompted by conflicts of opinion amongst family members. One student had responded by attempting to give equal support to those involved. As this extract illustrates, however, this approach led to new dilemmas about how to help:

> I left that meeting feeling absolutely shattered. I felt like I'd been pushed and pulled apart for two hours. I mean here were two women, mother and daughter, who both needed my support to cope with this crisis, yet by supporting one I would be undermining the other. ... The way I dealt with that was by trying to give them both some support. I was literally taking it in turns - supporting the mum over one thing, and then the daughter over another. It was after that meeting that I decided I couldn't see them together any more, so for the rest of the time I saw one one week and one the next. The thing that puzzles me though is how you choose between different theories when you're working with a family like this. There were so many different points of view, depending who you spoke to, and as many different theories to match. I mean you've got bereavement theory, family theory, individual life stages theory, theories of adolescence, and they were all relevant to this one family. Now, how do you integrate that? I wanted to be able to put them together in one picture, but you need an overview for that. (Final placement student)

As a second extract from the same account illustrates, the student concerned began to feel increasingly emmeshed in the situation she described and

decreasingly able to help:

> I ended up feeling very much in the middle of it, and I think I was. I was being pushed and pulled along, trying to meet all these different needs. I ended up jumping about from one theory to another and getting nowhere with any of it. I needed to find a way of planning or organising the data in a way that I could understand it so I could get ahead of the things that were happening, rather than just following on, picking up the pieces.

The second student's response to conflict amongst family members was reminiscent of the everyday social approach, in that she had chosen to work only with the family member who seemed best disposed towards her:

> The reason I started seeing his mother on her own was I think because I was a bit frightened of his father. I would have liked to have kept seeing them all together, but I suppose it was a way of allaying my anxiety a bit that I could work with somebody who I knew wouldn't shout at me. At least she could be worked on because she seemed to concede that there were things that were worrying her, whereas he was saying there wasn't a problem and he seemed the sort of person who'd get quite aggressive if you contradicted him. (First placement student)

Eventually, in some cases after trying to implement a third method of intervention, all six students whose accounts are the focus of this discussion exhausted their repertoire and fell back on more everyday explanations of the situations they encountered, including in two cases the use of negative value judgements to explain the failure of their attempts at intervention. In these circumstances, as the following extracts illustrate, the students eventually withdrew from their attempt to help:

> In the end it became clear that nothing I did was going to make any difference. I don't want to sound as if I'm making excuses, but I think that had a lot to do with the way this kid was. I mean I like to approach things generally with the attitude that everyone has some strengths, but honestly this kid was so dozy. A more unprepossessing kid it would be difficult to imagine. I suppose that's really why I started seeing them less often, because from my point of view it was very hard work spending an hour with him. (First placement student)

> The systems theory didn't really help in the end. I think if I made any sense of it at all I just saw it all individually. He was so surly and unresponsive it was difficult to get anywhere with him, and his father was like that too. He was an aggressive, evasive man. His mother, although she was more amenable to working with me, she didn't make any effort to change anything. I think she was just manipulating me with her cups of tea and kitkats. It

> got to the stage where I dreaded going round there. I used to put it off as long as I could. (First placement student)

In the remaining four cases the students' failure to achieve the results they expected lead eventually to a pattern identical to that described by some students who had deployed theory only with hindsight, in that they continued to meet with the people concerned on a regular, planned basis without any clear idea about how to help. This extract provides an illustration:

> Like I said, eventually I came down to the idea that what they needed was a granny figure to help them cope. Even though it's not a social work role, in the end there wasn't much else I could do. I just hoped that by visiting every week I was doing some good by letting them offload onto me a bit. (Final placement student)

Amongst both these students and those who had ended up in a similar position through deploying theory with hindsight there was a common tendancy, in line with the process of legitimation described earlier, to reframe this kind of approach in terms of the kind of methods of intervention associated with a psychodynamic perspective. The student quoted above, for example, added this comment to her description of her eventual approach:

> I suppose you could call it more of a therapeutic approach, you know giving people opportunities to ventilate feelings, though I wasn't really thinking of that at the time.

As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, references to the ideas associated with psychodynamic explanations of human development and behaviour featured frequently in the students' accounts. In many cases, however, these references occured in the context of the kind of reframing documented above. This suggests, then, that the psychodynamic perspective was not necessarily a particularly favoured perspective, although it occured frequently in the students' accounts. Rather, the everyday activities on which the students eventually fell back were more readily reframed in terms of the "talking therapies" associated with this perspective than in terms of the other perspectives to which they referred in the course of their accounts.

Before going on to explore the third approach to practice identified in the course of the research the main features of the fragmented approach will be summarised.

Summary

In contrast with the approach described in the previous chapter, in the context of the fragmented approach the students had drawn on the kind of knowledge which is commonly described as theoretical to explain the situations they described. The type of theory on which they drew has been defined as ready made theory because it consisted of explanations which were handed on to the students by teachers and authors or through practice agencies. In making use of this theoretical knowledge the students experienced considerable problems which have been seen to stem from a conflictual relationship between the use of ready made theory and other sources of knowledge. In order to resolve dilemmas stemming from the conflicts they encountered, some students adopted an approach to practice within which they managed their interactions in line with their everyday knowledge and the principles of practice to which they aspired. Consequently they made use of their theoretical knowledge only with hindsight. In contrast, other students took the opposite course and deployed ready made theories as prescriptive recipes for practice which displaced both their everyday knowledge about the management of interactions and the principles of practice to which they aspired.

In the context of the fragmented approach the students continued to experience difficulty in arriving at an understanding of the situations they described. When they deployed theory only with hindsight their hesitancy in exploring lines of thought based on theoretical explanations led to the development of speculative ideas for which no confirmation was sought or obtained. On the other hand, when the students deployed ready made theory as recipes for practice their understanding of the situations they described was fragmented and disjointed, reflecting their abandonment of one theory and method of intervention after another as they failed to achieve the expected results.

Equally, the students experienced difficulty in helping the people with whom they worked. When they had deployed theory only with hindsight some students had been unable to establish the kind of relationship they wanted with the people concerned. In other cases they had been dependent to a large extent on the ideas and initiatives of the people with whom they worked. In those cases where they did make suggestions intended to help the people concerned they remained dissatisfied with the results because their

suggestions were not consonant with their own ideas. On the other hand, when they deployed theory as recipes for practice the students had relied on the people with whom they worked cooperating in the interventions they attempted. They very rarely received that cooperation, however, and their interventions rarely met with the expected results.

Chapter 8
THE FLUENT APPROACH

Introduction

This third approach to practice was distinguished from the fragmented approach on the basis of the ways in which the students used the sort of explanations for situations which are commonly termed theoretical in making sense of the situations they described. The aim of this chapter is to examine their approach to the use of these explanations and to illustrate how that approach enabled them to resolve the conflicts and dilemmas associated with the fragmented approach. As in the preceding chapters an overview of the approach will be presented first. In the case of this approach, however, it has been necessary to draw rather more extensively than in the previous chapters on the students' accounts in presenting an overview, because the approach involved a range of cognitive and interpersonal skills which are not readily described without some illustration. Having presented this overview the approach will again be examined in more detail from the perspective of the ways in which the students went about obtaining and interpreting information. Their approach to helping the people with whom they worked will then be considered in the final section of the chapter.

8.1. An Overview of The Fluent Approach

As was noted in the previous chapter, in terms of the content of the students' knowledge there was some considerable overlap between the fluent approach to practice and the fragmented approach. In the context of this third approach the students referred to a similar range of theoretical explanations to those described in the previous chapter. There were, however, significant differences in the ways in which they deployed their theoretical knowledge. The main difference lay in the fact that in the context of this approach the students did not rely on ready made theoretical explanations in the form in which they were handed on by teachers and others to make sense of the situations they described. Instead they made use of this ready made knowledge in

constructing their own theories. The theories they constructed can be described as "custom made" in order to distinguish them from the ready made theories associated with the fragmented approach. This term was chosen in preference to the term "home made" in order to avoid the negative connotations carried by that term as a result of unfavourable comparisons between "practice wisdom" and ready made theory as a source of knowledge for social work. The students' ability to construct custom made theories was associated with the development of a range of cognitive and interpersonal skills which were the hallmark of the fluent approach. The remainder of this preliminary discussion will therefore focus on describing these skills.

Amongst the range of skills which distinguished the fluent approach from the other approaches to practice identified in the course of the research was a skill which perhaps sounds deceptively simple, namely an ability to actively listen in the course of face to face interactions. Within the literature of social work practice the ability to listen appears to be a skill which is largely taken for granted. Davies (1985), for example, does not include this ability amongst the essential skills he describes. Nor is an ability to listen included amongst the core skills required for the award of the new Diploma in Social Work (CCETSW, 1989b). Although Butler and Elliot (1985) include "listening" in a checklist of skills required for practice, in the course of their discussion of these skills talking rather than listening appears to be given precedence:

> In turn, of course, the practitioner needs to work on receiving messages from other people as accurately as possible. This means being prepared to translate, rephrase, and reflect on written, spoken and gestured material ... (p.26)

Where more attention is paid to listening, the ability appears to be associated only with counselling as a method of intervention. Coulshed (1988, p.26), for example, includes an ability to "Let a person finish talking without reacting" in her inventory of counselling skills, but makes no mention of this ability in her earlier discussion of assessment skills.

The accounts of the students who took part in this research suggest that this apparent neglect or marginalisation of the ability to listen is misplaced, not least because it was an ability which they experienced particular difficulty in acquiring. Amongst those students who had learnt how to listen by the end of training the development of the ability was regarded as a significant contribution to their practice. As one student put it:

> I no longer feel I have to *do* something all the time. I can sit and be quiet and just listen. If I've been able to be helpful it's been that rather than any wonderful intervention. (Final placement student)

As this extract from her account suggests, during her first placement this student's approach had been very typical of the deployment of theory as recipes for practice. While it is probably clear that in the context of this approach the students' anxiety to be seen to be proficient intruded on their ability to listen to the people with whom they worked, it might be thought that an ability to listen was a central feature of both the everyday social approach and the hindsight deployment of theory. The students' accounts suggest, however, that there was a qualitative difference between the ways in which they listened in the context of those approaches and the fluent approach. As has been seen, in the context of the everyday social approach the students unquestioningly accepted the information offered by the people with whom they worked. In some cases their approach seems to have been more akin to what Nelson-Jones (1988, p.13) has described as "hearing" than to "listening". In other cases their reliance on affective sources of understanding resulted in a passive approach which involved soaking in information rather than actively attempting to understand what was meant. Equally, when the students deployed theory with hindsight they actively attempted to understand the information offered by the people with whom they worked only once they were removed from the pressures of their face to face interactions. One student's description of her part in her interactions as that of "a sponge" captures the passivity of these approaches to listening.

In contrast both with this sponge like approach, and with the deployment of theory as recipes for practice, in the context of the fluent approach the students were able to achieve a balance between passively soaking in and too swiftly interpreting information which involved an active attempt to make sense of information as it emerged in the course of their face to face interactions. They associated the development of this ability with a range of cognitive skills which were a further hallmark of the fluent approach, and which revolved around their approach to the use of ready made theory. Although an increasing fluency in interweaving these cognitive skills was one of the most striking features of their approach, some different strands can be separated out and examined in more detail.

In the context of the fluent approach the part played by ready made theory in

the process of making sense of a situation was quite different from either of the patterns associated with the fragmented approach. In contrast with the pattern described in the previous chapter as involving the hindsight deployment of theory, the information which emerged in the course of the students' interactions with the people with whom they worked was not examined in the light of theory only after the event. Instead the students used the ready made theories on which they drew as frameworks to simultaneously guide the gathering and interpretation of information. On the other hand, ready made theories were not regarded as capable in themselves of offering complete explanations for a situation. Rather, the students emphasised the importance of assessing the likely validity of their theoretical ideas in the light of the information emerging about a particular situation. If necessary they were then able to shape and adapt their original ideas in order to take into account the particular circumstances of the people with whom they worked. It was in this sense that their approach to listening was an active rather than a passive approach.

In the process of developing and adapting their original ideas in the light of emerging information the students drew as seemed appropriate on the different ideas offered by different ready made theoretical explanations. Rather than regarding different theoretical explanations as discrete, mutually exclusive bodies of knowledge, they viewed them as building blocks from which an understanding might be constructed. As one student explained it:

> The systems theory gave me the bones, if you like, but the psychodynamic theory put the flesh on those bones. (Final placement student)

In addition to ideas derived from different ready made theoretical explanations, the students wove into the fabric of their custom made theories some more everyday sources of understanding. In particular, as in the context of other approaches to practice, they regarded an ability to put themselves in the shoes of the people with whom they worked as an important source of understanding. It was seen in the preceding chapter that in the context of the fragmented approach theoretical explanations and this more everyday source of understanding were treated for the most part as mutually exclusive, incompatible bodies of knowledge. Although some students did speak of resonances between the two, those resonances were treated as a source of legitimation for an unstructured, atheoretical approach. As a result their

affective responses displaced their theoretical knowledge, while themselves remaining, as in the context of an everyday social approach, at the level of unchecked assumptions. In contrast, in the context of the fluent approach the students did not take it for granted that their affective responses were an accurate reflection of the feelings and needs of the people with whom they worked. Instead they were concerned to separate out their own feelings and to assess their likely validity as a source of information about the feelings and needs of the people concerned. In doing so they again made use of ready made theories to examine the origin and meaning of their feelings. This student explained something of what was involved:

> You've got to be able to put yourself in your client's shoes, otherwise it's too cold and clinical and I think you miss a lot, but at the same time once the emotions get involved things can get very cloudy. That's where the theory helps. It helps you to stand back a bit and look at your feelings in a more detached sort of way so you can see why you might be feeling certain things. Once you've got that straight you can bring the feelings back in and see what the whole makes. (First placement student)

The process described by this student was not dissimilar to the process described by Nelson-Jones (1988) in his examination of the skills required by counsellors as "inner listening", although he makes no mention of the part which might be played in the process by the counsellor's theoretical knowledge:

> Listening, however, does not just take place between people, it also takes place *within* each person. Indeed your *inner* listening, or being appropriately sensitive to your own thoughts and feelings may be vital to your *outer* listening involving understanding another. (p.14)

The interweaving of theory and more everyday sources of understanding described above was extended in turn to an approach to experiential learning which also distinguished the fluent approach from others. In the context of other approaches few students drew on previous experiences of practice as a source of knowledge for the new situations they encountered, and those students who did so deployed ways of thinking about situations which were familiar from their previous experience on the assumption that they were applicable in every situation. In contrast, the development of the fluent approach was associated with an increasing ability to make considered use of previous experience which had some similarity with the ability to transfer learning described by Harris (1983) and Gardiner (1984), amongst others. Although the ability to transfer learning is an ability required of qualifying

students, and is generally recognised as an essential ability in a field of practice as wide ranging as social work, descriptions of the process involved have hitherto rested more on educational theory than on practitioners' accounts of their cognitive processes. Gardiner offers one such description:

> By the "transfer of learning" I mean .... having an experience, recognising what is salient, the building up of patterns, making patterns of patterns which become generalisations, and then the recognition in new situations that the earlier generalisations may be appropriate or relevant. Thus, both generalisations derived from particular experiences *and* the application of these generalisations are essential components of the transfer of learning. (p.56)

While the accounts of social work practice which are the focus of this chapter have some consonance with this description, they also highlight some apparently undocumented aspects of the development of the ability to transfer learning. In particular, they suggest that in the initial stages of developing the ability ready made theory can play an important part in the formulation of generalisations. This student's description of the way in which she had made use of her previous experience provides an illustration:

> I think it starts off when you're there with your client and something rings a bell. You start to think about the content of what's being said and you tie that in with the non-verbal things. Then you think: now why is that ringing bells? You work back from there into situations you've seen before. Then you think, now what theory do I know that might connect those things? You have to bring the theory in to get a wider picture, because your analysis is only going to be as good as the experience you've got. So I would say I tend to tie it into experience first and then tie it into theory to get a wider look at it. Then you bring it back to the context to see if it gels, to see if it needs personalising. If it doesn't gel then you try to find out more. So it starts of quite intuitive, you pick it up on that level first, and that's where your experience comes in. Then it gets more analytical as you bring the theory in, but you have to personalise it again. It can't just stay as theory because it might not always fit. (First placement student)

A year later, towards the end of her education and training, the same student gave a slightly different account of the process by means of which she had made sense of the situation she described on this occasion. Although this account was unique amongst those obtained in the course of the research it was of particular interest, because it suggests that ready made theory may play a diminishing part in the transfer of learning as experience accrues:

> I think I'm drawing a lot more on my experience now. Before I was very conscious of tying my experience into theory, whereas now I can just use the experience, because I've got the theory in there. I think what it is, is I've tied a lot of the theory to examples so I can use the example rather than going back to the theory every time. I can recognise myself doing it, it's interesting to analyse. The whole process has sort of speeded up. You've got to be careful, because no two situations are exactly alike, but at the same time the sort of things you come up against as a social worker do have a lot in common.

This description of the use of examples already linked with theory in short circuiting the process of making sense of a situation has some consonance with the findings of the study of nursing practice undertaken by Benner (1984) which were outlined in Chapter Two. As was seen there, Benner found that experienced nurses rely increasingly on what she terms paradigm cases to guide their work rather than on preconceived rules and ideas. While it is clearly not possible to draw any firm conclusions on the basis of one account, it may be that the development of expertise in social work involves a similar process within which the ability to transfer learning plays an important part.

In the course of the discussion so far it has been seen that the students were able to develop ideas about the situations they described by making use of different sources of understanding to compliment and augment each other. These ideas, however, did not in themselves constitute custom made theories. Rather the construction of custom made theory depended on a further range of skills without which the students' ideas would have been little different from the kind of speculative ideas associated with the hindsight deployment of theory. The crucial difference between that approach and the fluent approach lay in an ability on the part of the students concerned to communicate their ideas to the people with whom they worked.

As was seen in the previous chapter, in the context of the fragmented approach the students had rarely attempted to explain their ideas to the people concerned. In contrast, in the context of this approach they were concerned to ensure that the people with whom they worked were aware of the direction their own thoughts were taking and were able to discuss and contribute to their ideas. The process involved had two facets. On the one hand the students made use of some of the techniques such as summarising and rephrasing information which are described in the literature of both social work and counselling to check out with the people concerned that they had understood the information offered. On the other hand they were also able to

communicate ideas based on theoretical explanations to the people with whom they worked. They went about this partly by translating the specialised language associated with ready made theories into more everyday language which the people concerned could understand, and partly by offering concrete examples drawn either from their interactions with the people concerned, or from experiences with which they could associate. This student, for example, explained why she had used her client's own life experiences in order to illustrate her ideas:

> That's one thing I've learnt, is that you can't just put your ideas onto your client and expect them to understand it in the same way you do. You've got to try and look at it through their eyes and see how you can make it make sense for them. You've got to tie it into their experiences, things they can understand. (Final placement student)

In common with their increasing ability to listen actively to the people with whom they worked, the students whose accounts are the focus of this chapter regarded their ability to communicate their ideas as a significant stage in the development of their practice. As this student put it:

> When I left that meeting I was wiped out. I felt like I'd been working really hard for an hour, but I was elated too. It was the first time I'd been able to *do* something in an interview, to use the information that was there and put it back to them so they could see how I saw it. (First placement student)

While some considerable attention has been paid in the literature of social work practice to the reframing or rephrasing of clients' ideas, less attention appears to have been paid to how social workers might communicate theoretical ideas. In the course of the following discussion it will be seen, however, that the interweaving of both skills was the corner stone of the fluent approach.

8.2. Obtaining and Interpreting Information

In order to examine the ways in which the students made use of the skills described above in obtaining and interpreting information, the initial stages of their work will again be considered first. It will be seen that from the outset of their work their approach enabled them to resolve the conflicts and dilemmas associated with the fragmented approach. Having examined the students' approach in the initial stages of their work the kind of pattern which ensued

will be described. Finally the students' responses to questions about their eventual understanding of the situations they described will be examined.

8.2.1. The initial stages of the students' work

As was seen in the previous chapter, in the context of the fragmented approach the students had drawn on ready made theoretical explanations in examining the information initially available to them and in developing ideas about lines of enquiry which it might be useful to pursue. In the context of the fluent approach the students' initial approach was very similar, as was the basis of their choice of theoretical explanation at this stage. Here too, where work with children and their families was concerned systems theory was usually the theory of choice, while psychodynamic theories of human development and behaviour were drawn on where work with individuals was concerned. Even at this early stage, however, the students did not expect the theories on which they drew to provide a complete explanation for the situations they were to encounter. Instead, as has been seen, they regarded their initial choice of explanation as a flexible framework to guide their exploration of the situation to hand. This conceptualisation of the role of ready made theory laid the foundation for the resolution of the conflicts and dilemmas associated with the fragmented approach.

In the first place, the students' conceptualisation of the role of theory as one of guiding rather than dictating their approach appears to have gone some way towards enabling them to resolve the conflicts between the use of ready made theory and the principles of practice espoused by social workers which were associated with the fragmented approach. That this was the case emerged not so much from what the students said about the principles of practice to which they aspired as from their accounts of the ways in which they approached their work. In the context of this approach it was in fact unusual for the students to refer explicitly to the principles of practice which underpinned their approach. That they rarely did so seems to have been because they had found ways of resolving the conflicts described in the previous chapter, with the result that those conflicts were no longer a source of acute concern. The students made no mention, for example, of the sort of concerns about being judgemental or overly directive which were associated with the fragmented approach. Instead they regarded their initial ideas as sufficiently flexible to take into account their

informants' own ideas and particular circumstances. As this student put it:

> I know some of the jargon in family work is pretty awful, but I actually think some of it isn't as bad as it sounds. Like I never thought I'd hear myself using words like hypothesis - it sounds like you're conducting an experiment on your clients - but I've actually found it a really useful way of thinking about what you're doing. It gives you something to work from, rather than thinking where on earth do you start. It's the idea that you're just testing out ideas at this stage, not saying I'm the expert, I know what's wrong. (Final placement student)

In turn, by approaching their first meetings with a framework for guiding the gathering and interpretion of information in mind the students found that they were able to overcome the sort of concerns about the presentation of self which were associated with the fragmented approach. Because they were able to focus on identifying areas which might be explored and on planning their approach without fear of being judgemental or overly directive, they found that they were able to manage their anxiety about how they would be perceived by the people with whom they were to work. This student's response to a series of questions about how he had felt about undertaking the work he described provides an illustration:

> If I'm honest my first response to the idea of taking it on wasn't all that positive. I was anxious really, I think everyone is. The first time you go out to meet a group of strangers is very daunting. I was thinking more about myself really than about the work, you know, what would they think of me, would they think I was just a useless student. ... What helped with that was the reading I'd been doing before the placement started. One of the things that came over very strongly from the community work literature was this idea of standing back from things and having a good long look around before you rush into doing anything. So I thought right, I'll get some group work books out and see what kind of things might help with that, and that's where the yardstick came from. I got some books from the library and photocopied some of the tables of the different ways groups function so I could put them together and use them as a yardstick to guage how *this* group was functioning. ... I think it gave me a lot more confidence at the beginning. Before I think I wouldn't have planned it so much. I think I would have wanted to see how things went before I attempted anything more, but when you do that I think you're more anxious. I was still anxious, but I could hang onto that because the yardstick gave me something to focus on. (First placement student)

Equally, as this extract from a second account suggests, the students' recognition of the potential relevance of previous experiences of practice increased their confidence in the initial stages of their work, thus enabling

them to manage some of the anxieties associated with the fragmented approach:

> It made a big difference, realising that the work I'd been doing before was relevant. It gave me more confidence and I think when you're more confident you don't need to feel so much in control. (First placement student)

The flexibility of the students' initial thinking and planning greatly assisted them in resolving the conflict of aims associated with the fragmented approach. Rather than approaching their first meetings with the aim either of developing a warm relationship, or of establishing a purposeful, business like climate, they were able to approach their meetings with a clear but flexible agenda within which they could take into account the norms and conventions of social interactions without losing sight of the purpose of their work. As this extract illustrates, from their perspective, the more structured approach required to make use of theory in practice was not incompatible with the establishment of a helpful relationship:

> I think your ideas are always very tentative at that stage. You have to be prepared to rethink things as you go along, but even so I think having some sort of framework to start with helps. Even in the introductory bit, you know about the weather and how I found her flat and how difficult it is to find addresses in that scheme, it helped with that because I didn't feel I had to rush into the formal bit. ... A lot of it's confidence I think. I had an idea of the kind of things I wanted to know so it was a question of getting the balance right. Not rushing into it but not getting so carried away in the conversation that you can't get round to what you need to do. (First placement student)

As a second extract from the same account illustrates, the use of ready made theory as a flexible framework to guide the interpretation of information enabled the students to treat the social aspects of their interactions as a potentially useful source of information, thus further closing the gap between their ideas about the establishment of a helpful relationship and the use of theory in practice:

> Even while we were having coffee and chatting having an idea of the kind of things which might be important helped me to begin to sort the wheat from the chaff. You could begin to pick things out and pin them onto headings. Things about the isolation and where that fitted in with relationships and with her family. I'm not saying you should interpret everything, I mean people need to be able to talk about the weather without it having terribly deep significance, but I think there are things that come out of that kind of chit chat which can give you some

indication of whether or not you're on the right lines.

The students' accounts suggest, then, that their approach to the use of ready made theory and other sources of knowledge was influential in enabling them to resolve the problems described in the preceding chapter. Further evidence to support that view emerged from their responses to questions about how their first meetings had worked out.

As in the context of the fragmented approach the students had been concerned from the outset of their work to be clear with the people with whom they worked about their role and purpose. They did not achieve that aim, however, by means of a brief statement of fact, to be quickly set aside in the interests of developing a warm relationship. Nor did they expect the people concerned to be able to engage straight away in working to their own pre-determined agenda. Instead they saw the main purpose of their first meetings as one of negotiating their role and defining areas on which they might focus. In this process of negotiation their ability both to listen and to explain their own ideas played a central part.

Depending on their remit and on the initial response of the people with whom they worked, the students were prepared either to take the lead by outlining their own ideas about the areas which might be explored, or to listen first to their informant's concerns. When they found it necessary to take the lead themselves their emphasis was on making sure that the people concerned had understood them and were able to express their own point of view. In the light of the information which emerged they were then able to negotiate their role. This student's description of her approach provides an illustration:

> I thought if she was as withdrawn as the intake worker said she'd seemed to be I was going to have to take the lead. At the same time I didn't want to just assume that my ideas about what she needed were right. I wanted to make sure she had the chance to say what she wanted. Once she'd made coffee and we'd both relaxed a bit I started off by saying that from what the intake worker had told me there seemed to be several things worrying her. There were the bills and financial problems, but also she'd mentioned some worries about the wee boy and her relationship with his dad. I said that as far as I was concerned we could look at all those things, because it was part of my job to help with both financial and relationship problems, so perhaps we could look at what was worrying her most and decide where to start. It became pretty clear quite quickly that there was no way we were going to be able look at anything else until she felt more in control of the financial side. I think that's quite a difference actually in the way I approached it. I think before,

> because I had a lot of experience of working with children, I would have focussed on that instead of letting her decide. At the same time I didn't want to lose sight of the other things, because as I say I was working on this idea that we needed to look at how things had got so out of control, and I thought that might be connected with the relationship issues. I said she seemed to be most worried about the bills so I thought it would be a good idea to work on that first, but we could look at the other things later if she wanted to. (First placement student)

Equally, when their informants took the lead the students were able to listen without interupting, begin to interpret the information offered in the light of their theoretical framework, and then negotiate their role. This student's account provides a useful illustration because he described how, taken together, his approach to the use of ready made theory and his interpersonal skills had contributed to his approach:

> For the first half hour I couldn't get a word in. I think in the past I'd have been in a bit of a panic by that stage. I would probably have tried to stop them, either that or I'd have got totally lost. That's where having some sort of framework to look at it through really helped. I wasn't sitting there thinking oh my God how am I going to stop this, what am I going to say, I was actually really interested in what they were saying and how they were responding to each other. I could begin to test out some of my ideas, actually, as they were talking. When they seemed to be slowing down a bit I said something about how they'd given me a lot of information and I wanted to be sure I'd got it right, and then I told them how I'd understood what they'd been telling me. ... I didn't say right, let's look at this from a systemic perspective. It was more just a summary but reframing it a bit and then checking to make sure I'd got it right. Then I said I thought they'd done the right thing by asking for help because someone who wasn't so involved in it all could maybe help them to find a different way of dealing with it. I said that that was how I saw my part in it, rather than only working with Christopher himself, because after all I could only see him for an hour a week and they were his parents. From the way they reacted to that it was pretty clear that wasn't what they'd been expecting so I asked them what kind of help they'd been hoping for. There was quite a long silence, then his father said they'd hoped someone in authority would be able to instill a bit of sense in him. That's what I'd thought really, so I was glad he'd come out with it. I said that he was right that social workers do have powers they can use, but that that was a last resort and there were maybe some things they could try themselves. I said perhaps we could spend the next meeting looking in more detail at the things they had tried and how they'd worked out, so we could see if there was anything else they might try. They seemed reasonably happy with that. I think they were dubious about whether it would work, but I was pretty confident they'd come back and give it a try. (Final placement student)

As this account suggests, the students' use of ready made theory to guide the gathering and interpreting of information was of considerable assistance to them in working with groups of people. In contrast with the fragmented approach, in the context of this approach the students neither felt overwhelmed by the complexity of group interactions, nor resorted to hard and fast agendas in order to gain control over them. Instead they were able to use their theoretical frameworks to make sense both of the process of their interactions and of the information emerging from them. In the course of their accounts they referred to the part played by their theoretical frameworks in this process as one of enabling them to "stand back" a little from their interactions in order to gain a wider perspective. This extract from a second account provides a further illustration:

> The yardstick was incredibly useful actually because it made me more aware of – I had to think about what am I going to look for before I got there, because if I was going to be *in* the meeting I wouldn't be able to just sit back and observe. I needed to be able to play my part in the meeting and at the same time I needed to be able to stand back a bit and watch what was happening. (First placement student)

In turn, the students' approach to negotiating their role was also of assistance to them in working with groups. As was seen in the preceding chapter, in the context of the fragmented approach the difficulties experienced by the students in working with groups were compounded were conflicts of opinion occurred between the people concerned. In the context of this approach those students who encountered conflicts of opinion amongst the people with whom they worked had anticipated the liklihood of such conflict in the light of the theoretical frameworks which guided their initial approach. As a result they had been able to incorporate discussion of their own position in the process of negotiating their role. The position they negotiated for themselves was described by some students as a "neutral" role and by others as that of a faciltator or mediator. This extract provides an illustration of what was meant:

> Another thing I wanted to achieve in that first meeting was to clarify what sort of role I would have in the family meetings, and there again the systems theory was helpful because it kept me focussed on the issues behind her coming into care. I was very aware that the problems behind that hadn't been addressed and I was pretty sure that once we started working towards her going home the same problems would start up again. If I was right, looking at how they could come to some sort of solution to that was going to be the bulk of the work, so I wanted to make it clear that I was going to be taking a neutral role, that it wasn't part of my role to decide who was right and who was

> wrong, but that I would be someone on the outside who could help them to listen to each other and work things out for themselves. (Final placement student)

Similarly, the students' ability to negotiate their role with the people with whom they worked appears to have been of assistance to them in overcoming some of the problems associated with statutory work. The evidence available to support this view is rather limited, because only one of the nine accounts which depicted a fluent approach was an account of work which originated in a statutory requirement for social work involvement and not in the request of the people concerned. The information contained in this account can, however, be supplemented by drawing on the accounts of other students who were able to develop some of the skills associated with the fluent approach in the course of the work they described. Taken together these accounts suggest that just as the students did not regard ready made theories as right or wrong per se, so they did not conceptualise the right to self determination as an absolute right. Again, this emerged more from their accounts of the ways in which they approached their work than from anything they said about the right to self determination. This extract from the account of statutory work which was most typical of the fluent approach suggests, for example, that by including in his negotiation of his role a clear explanation of what his statutory remit might involve the student concerned had been able to define where the boundary between his duties and his client's rights lay:

> I wanted to be clear from the start about what my statutory role meant. The way I put it was that as the work went on it might be necessary for me to wear different hats. I thought that was probably something she would understand because it's quite a common place expression. I said that whereas it was important that she felt she could use our time to talk about the things she wanted to talk about, it was also important for me to be able to bring up things I needed to bring up as part of my supervisory role. The example I gave her was the obvious one of her behaviour in the unit, that if there were problems we would need to discuss them, and that would need to come first. (Final placement student)

An extract from a second account which in other respects was less typical of the fluent approach provides a further illustration of the advantages of this approach. In this case the student concerned had initially approached her work in a way which was fairly typical of the hindsight deployment of theory. Here she described how, during her second meeting with her client's mother, she had been able to negotiate a more structured role against the background

provided by a clear explanation of her statutory remit.

> When I went back the next time I was able to be a lot clearer about what I was doing. I explained that because I was involved on account of people's concerns about her daughter not going to school I needed to be able to focus on that. I said I understood that a lot of other things were worrying her, and that we could look at those things too, but that perhaps we could separate the two things out a bit. I said what I'd like to do today was to concentrate on her daughter because I had the report to write, but that next week we could come back to some of the things she'd been worried about and look at how they might fit in. I think that made things clearer for her, and it definitely made it a lot easier for me, because once I'd put it that way I felt ok about bringing her back to the subject. I could reassure her that I wasn't dismissing what she was saying and we could come back to it next week. (First placement student)

Halfway through her placement another student had also been able to overcome the problems she had experienced as a result of deploying theory as recipes for practice by re-negotiating her role in order to achieve a more helpful balance between her duties and her client's rights:

> The meeting before that I'd gone along with my agenda as usual, but by then I knew things were going very wrong. I should never have done what I did. He'd already identified what was making him offend, and even *why* he was doing it, but all I did was keep telling him what *I* thought. I still thought at that time that I had to know best, that this is what a social worker is supposed to do. ... It was a very hard way to learn, but it was good learning for me. I realised I had to get back to the basic principles of why am I here, I'm here to help you, and also to put some responsibility on him to decide what *he* wanted to discuss. ... It went really well. We talked about his grandparents, and, you know, I had assumed that everything was brilliant there, but it wasn't. Then he started telling me about his stepdad, and we sort of uncovered a lot of emotion about the feelings he had, which were very intense feelings. (First placement student)

These accounts suggest, then, that rather than either disowning their statutory role or setting aside their concern to respect the right of the people with whom they worked to self determination, the skills associated with the fluent approach enabled the students to achieve a balance between fulfilling their statutory duties and the rights of the people concerned.

As was the case with other approaches to practice, the students' initial approach to their work was both a prelude to and a pattern for the remainder of their work. The main themes wich emerged from their responses to questions about how their work had proceded will be examined next in order to illustrate the kind of pattern which ensued.

8.2.2. The pattern which ensued

The students' responses to questions about how their work had proceeded reveal the advantages of their initial approach. In particular, because they and the people concerned had agreed on the work to be undertaken, the students felt able to undertake that work without the intrusion of doubts about the legitimacy of their activities. At the same time, however, they placed continuing emphasis on making sure that their informants understood why they were focussing on a particular area or pursuing particular lines of enquiry. This student's description of her approach to an adoption assessment provides an illustration:

> Even though we'd spent the first meeting discussing the areas I would need to cover and they'd agreed to that, I found I had to be very careful about explaining why I needed to ask about some things when we actually came to them. I think there was a danger that because it seemed self-explanatory to me I might rush on with it without stopping to think whether they really understood why I was asking, and if I did that they might feel less able to say what they thought. The section on their personal histories was an example of that. I mentioned at the end of one meeting that we'd be moving onto that, and they said yes, they knew, but there was something about the way they said it that made me ask how they felt about that. I was glad I did because they were actually quite worried about it. Neither of them had had a particularly happy childhood and they were worried that would go against them. I think in the end I managed to put it in a way they could understand which didn't leave them feeling threatened. I tried to use specific examples they could connect with. ... One example was how the way they'd felt about school might influence things if they had a child who hated school, so it was important to look at these things ahead of time. I think that rang a lot bells, especially with him, because straight away he said, oh when you put it that way I can see why you have to look at those things. That was very much the pattern of it, making sure all the time that they understood what we were doing and why. (Final placement student)

This emphasis on continually explaining and re-negotiating the work to be undertaken also distinguished the students' approach to the discussion of difficult or painful issues. In contrast with an approach involving the hindsight deployment of theory, in the context of this approach the students were not afraid to initiate discussion of potentially difficult issues. Rather than relying on the people with whom they worked for permission to address these subjects, they saw it as part of their role to create opportunties for their

discussion. As this student put it:

> In the past I would have been very dubious about talking about something like bereavement. I think I would have waited for them to bring it up, and even then I'm not sure I could have handled it. Now I think if you're the worker you have to take some responsibility. You can't force people to talk about things if they don't want to, but you can make sure they know the opportunity is there and you can make it as comfortable as it can be for them to do it. (Final placement student)

On the other hand, the students did not assume that difficult issues could be addressed without careful preparation. This student explained how her initial approach to negotiating her role had enabled her to prepare the ground for discussion of some issues she thought relevant:

> By the third meeting the financial problems were a lot more under control, so it was a case of seeing whether she wanted to look at the relationship issues. I thought the best way to do that was by reviewing what had been achieved so far. I wanted to give her some positive feedback, because as I say I was working on the idea that the reason things had got so out of control was to do with her low self esteem. It was as if she felt powerless to take control of anything in her life. At the same time I thought that would give me the opportunity to go back to what we'd said at our first meeting about maybe looking at the relationship issues later. (First placement student)

As a second extract from the same account illustrates, in discussing difficult issues the students continued to place emphasis on explaining why they were asking particular questions, while at the same time allowing the people concerned to determine the pace of their work:

> It felt like a transitional phase, like you can push it a little bit but then she's going to need her space. It seemed really important to push it a little bit by following up the lead in, but not saying I want to talk about this so that's what we're going to do, letting her go as far as she wanted to, because she was still a bit wary. There was a couple of times she'd look at me suspiciously and I said, well I'm asking about this because - . It was still a case of going very slowly, letting her know why I was asking certain things, letting her stop when she wanted to stop.

An extract from another account illustrates how a similar range of skills had assisted the student concerned in addressing issues relating to parenting and child care which had posed particular problems in the context of the fragmented approach:

> I think what I've started doing is bringing in what you could call the counselling skills. I think sometimes if people listen to me they might think I'm overly theoretical. The family's so

> sensitive and so emotional and there's so many issues involved that sometimes I go away and draw the system out - what's happening here, why do they do that, what effect is that having over here. The difference though is going back and saying I feel this may be happening. Feeding back to people, clarifying, keeping with something even though it's painful, but letting them take their time, making sure they've understood, bringing it back all the time to why are we doing this, what are the goals, how is this relationship going to be able to function. So through that we've been able to look at the double bind messages, how it's impossible for the child to do two things at once. (Final placement student)

While enabling his client and her family to explore issues which seemed relevant in their own time, the same student had not hesitated to take a more directive approach when his statutory role seemed to require it. In response to further questioning about the skills on which he had drawn he explained how his initial approach had enabled him to combine these two facets of his role:

> Apart from the counselling skills which we've talked about there was a lot to do with the exercise of personal authority. Being able to be supportive and yet also saying I have to go to the Reporter with this, or we have to look at this behaviour now. ... I don't think the behaviour was something we could *not* have talked about, but because we'd discussed that the first time I met her it didn't feel like a huge shift. It gave me a springboard for being able to address that with her.

It will probably be apparent that, at least from the students' own perspective, their use of ready made theory in interpreting information did not result in conflicts of opinion with the people with whom they worked. From their perspective, their approach had resulted in the development of shared ideas within which their theoretical knowledge and the views of the people with whom they worked extended and enhanced each other. This student's description of her approach provides an illustration:

> I think it's really important to level with people. It's no use my having all these ideas if I don't share them with her, because that's not going to do her any good. The thing is it's no use telling your client that you think they might have low self esteem because of this theory you've been reading about. She wasn't going to understand that. What I did was I tried to tie it into the way she was when we met and the things she said. ... I think I said something like "I've been feeling for a while now that you don't have a very good opinion of yourself" She looked a bit taken aback at that, so then I gave her some examples of how she always seemed to give other people what they wanted, whether that was what she wanted or not. She said it was right enough, everything was done the way her boyfriend wanted and

> she sometimes did get pissed off with it but she still let him have his way. So then I explained that I didn't know why it was but that sometimes things that have happened when you're younger can give you a low opinion of yourself, did that ring any bells for her? That was when she started talking about her brother's death and the way that had been dealt with in the family, and it went on from there. It was really a case of giving her some ideas she could work with. Once she had the ideas she could take them and run. She left me standing sometimes, the way she was able to make connections between things. She'd bring in things I'd never even thought of. (First placement student)

Equally, the students' approach enabled them to resolve the difficulties associated with conflicts of opinion amongst the people with whom they worked which had played an influential part in shaping the fragmented approach. As was seen in the previous chapter, when the students deployed theory only with hindsight they had been able to make sense of conflicts of opinion amongst the people with whom they worked after the event, but had been unable to make use of their ideas in the course of their face to face interactions. On the other hand, when they deployed theory as recipes for practice they had felt unable to continue working together with people whose views conflicted. In contrast with either of these approaches, in the context of this approach the students' negotiation of a neutral, mediating role allowed them to make use of that role in enabling the people concerned to communicate with each other. This student's description of his approach suggests that his increasing ability to examine his own feelings had contributed to his ability to maintain the neutral stance required:

> There were times when I'd find myself getting angry in meetings. The way she was treating the other members of the group was so demeaning. But I'd say to myself: watch it, remember you're supposed to be neutral here, just make sure other people get their say and don't be tempted to jump in. There again, I wasn't afraid to stop her if she was cutting other people off because I wasn't attacking her either. I was just making sure everyone there had a say, which is what I'd said I'd do. (First placement student)

In turn, by adopting and maintaining a neutral role the students were able to treat conflicts of opinion amongst the people with whom they worked as a potentially valuable source of information about the situations within which they were working. For example:

> I felt very uncomfortable at first. I suppose that's a natural reaction, I mean nobody feels particularly comfortable in that kind of situation, but it was interesting too. I could feel myself

> constantly wanting to move out of that kind of role and having to stop myself. I think in the past I would probably have identified with the mother and supported her, but because we'd agreed this role with them I felt I could sit back a bit and look more at how the family were interacting, and that was very revealing. (Final placement student)

Overall, the students accounts of their meetings with the people with whom they worked convey an impression of painstaking, persistent efforts to carry through the work they had negotiated to undertake. By actively striving to understand and be understood in turn, and by working to overcome barriers, whether they stemmed from their own feelings or were intrinsic to the situations they described, the students appear to have been able to achieve a balance between the establishment of a warm relationship and the pursuit of their negotiated goals. This approach was reflected in their responses to questions about their eventual understanding of the situations they described.

8.2.3. The students' understanding of the situations they described

As was seen at the beginning of this chapter, the students' distinctive approach to obtaining and interpreting information led to the construction of custom made theories to explain the situations they described. By drawing on different ready made theories, on previous experiences of practice and on an analysis of their affective responses, the students were able to develop ideas about the situations they described which, as they emerged, were checked against the information available and explored with the people concerned. In the light of new information emerging, and particularly in the light of the responses of the people with whom they worked, the students were able to develop and extend their ideas about the situations they described. Although the different strands involved in this process have been drawn out and examined separately here, from the students' perspective they formed part of a fluid process which some students were able to describe in response to questions about how they had made sense of the situations they described. This student, for example, used both words and gestures to describe the process involved:

> I think patterns emerge, fragments of information and ideas that come together to make a pattern, so you're building a picture as you go along. No, it's less solid than a picture. It's more like two pictures one on top of the other. There's the picture in my mind, how I see it, which is made up of, just everything you know - what people say, how they *are*, how *you*

> feel when you're with them, how that fits with the theories you know, or other experiences you've had. Then there's the situation as they see it. It's an adjusting picture [the student began to demonstrate by sliding her hands over each other]. You're holding your picture against theirs and adjusting your picture, and at the same time you're trying to show them your picture, so it's like two pictures adjusting each other. (First placement student)

On the basis of this and earlier descriptions of the fluent approach it might be thought that the development of the students' ideas had taken place only in the course of their interactions with the people concerned. This was not, however, the case. Although an increasing ability to develop and communicate ideas in the course of their interactions was a hallmark of the students' approach, they also spoke of the importance of written work, including both required work such as case notes or summaries, and written work undertaken on their own initiative, in enabling them to formulate and develop ideas. This students' response to a question about what had helped her in making sense of the situation she described provides an illustration:

> One thing was the case notes. It's only since I've been on placement that I've realised how useful case notes can be, not just to other people who might need to know what you've been doing, but actually to yourself. ... It's to do with having to make things clear for other people. It's no use rambling on, putting down every little thing, that's not going to mean much to someone else. You need to pick out the main things and see where they fit together so you can put them under headings where they belong. ... It helps you to get a better understanding yourself, because it's when you sit down and think now how does this all fit together that you can really get a good look at it and make sure there's no loose ends or things that don't add up. (First placement student)

It was seen in the preceding chapters that in the context of other approaches the dificulties experienced by the students in reaching an understanding of the situations they described were reflected in their descriptions of their written work. Conversly, in the context of this approach the students' use of written work in formulating and developing ideas was associated with an ability to develop an overview of the situations they described which was unique to the fluent approach. In place of the speculative or episodic accounts which were associated with the fragmented approach, in the context of this approach the students responded to questions about their eventual understanding with relatively succinct accounts within which their ideas were clearly presented, together with evidence to support them. In keeping with the flexibility of their approach, however, their ideas were presented not as cut and dried

explanations of the situations they described, but as working models within which space was reserved for uncertainty. This student, for example, was able to give a reasonably clear account of a complex situation with reference to the different sources of information and knowledge on which he had drawn, but with the caution that some uncertainty inevitably remained:

> I don't think you can ever be certain you've got it exactly right. There's always new information or things you've missed so your ideas are always changing. Having said that, you have to reach some sort of understanding, otherwise you'd be useless. ... My assessment first and foremost was that this girl's behaviour was related to her parents' marriage breaking up. They had split up when she was twelve, just as she was coming into her adolescence and needing some stability to work out her own identity. Now, if you want to know where that came from I'd have to say it was a mixture of things rather than any one theory. It was partly the systems theory and partly some of the learning from the human development lectures, but also I've seen that in a few cases, that that seems to be a very vulnerable age. What confirmed that for me was the effect her behaviour was having. I mean this was the first time her parents had spoken to each other for two years, and it came about because of her. So by her behaviour she wasn't just expressing the difficulties she was having, she was bringing them together. I don't mean that was something she was particularly conscious of, but it was there in her reaction when her father said he wasn't coming to any meetings. From what the staff said it was a very extreme temper tantrum, totally out of control. I suppose you could say that was the intuitive bit, some sense of what it must take to lose control to that extent at that age, but it added up with the other things too, it wasn't just intuition. So that was the bottom line of the assessment if you like. Behind that there was the way her mother was responding to her behaviour, and behind that again there were all the reasons why her mother was responding the way she was, things to do with her own background and her feelings about her husband. All those factors were important in deciding how best I could work with them. (Final placement student)

As this extract suggests, the ways in which the students obtained and interpreted information were closely interwoven with the ways in which they attempted to help the people concerned. This aspect of their work will be examined in the final section of this chapter.

8.3. Helping People in The Context of The Fluent Approach

In the previous chapter it was seen that in the context of the fragmented approach the students had experienced difficulty in helping the people with

whom they worked, at least from their own perspective, either because they had been reluctant to expose their own ideas or because they had expected the people concerned to cooperate in the kind of interventions which seemed rule book fashion to fit. In contrast, all those students whose accounts are the focus of this chapter thought that they had been able to help the people with whom they worked. Although the opinion of the people concerned remains unknown, the students' own accounts suggest that their approach was one which had enabled the people with whom they worked to become clearer about their situation, and hence about how the problems and needs involved might be addressed. In order to present the evidence available to support this view, the six accounts of practice which were most typical of the fluent approach will be examined first. The accounts of three students who had been able to develop the skills associated with the fluent approach in the course of the work they described will then be examined.

In two of the six cases which were most typical of the fluent approach the remit of the students concerned had involved counselling and assessment rather than any more direct approach to problem solving. One student's remit had been to counsel and assess the circumstances of a young woman who had indicated that she wanted to place the baby she was expecting for adoption. In another case the student's remit had been to counsel and assess the potential of a couple who wished to adopt a child. In these cases the students had been able to draw on their ability both to make sense of information as it emerged, and to explain their own ideas in fulfilling the dual purpose of their involvement. In turn, from their perspective at any rate, not only their own assessment but also their clients' understanding was enhanced. This student's response to a question about how her work had left her feeling provides an illustration:

> I'm pleased with the way it all came together. I think they did most of it themselves but there were some things I had more of a spoke in. I think getting them to think things through themselves, encouraging that analytical ability, helping them make the links, that was my part. When they started to do that for themselves, linking with the past, linking with their nephews and nieces, that felt good because it felt like I'd enabled them to do that. After that writing the report wasn't nearly as daunting as it seemed. It was like you've *got* the guidelines, you've *got* the theories, and now you've got the information to fill that out. It had gone from being a generalised assessment to being an assessment of this particular couple. (Final placement student)

In the remaining four cases the students' work had involved a more direct problem solving remit. In two cases their approach to helping the people concerned had nevertheless remained centred on enabling them to become clearer about about how the problems they faced might be addressed. This student, for example, thought that his ability to maintain a neutral stance and to make use of information as it emerged in the course of their interactions had played a part in enabling his client's parents to change the ways in which they dealt with their son's behaviour:

> What pleased me most was that I'd been able to use what was there, I was able to use that as a tool rather than getting caught up in it. I was pleased when it worked, which I think it did. When they came back the following week they said straight away that things were a lot better. ... From a position where this kid honestly had nothing left to lose in terms of sanctions they could apply they'd started to build that back up. You could see it in the way they were together too. They were treating him as if they were proud of him instead of putting him down all the time. In fact his dad said it. When I said how pleased I was things were better, his dad said well it's Chris too you know, he's made a real effort. (Final placement student)

A second student had brought to bear the skills which were the hallmark of the fluent approach in working both individually and jointly with his client and her mother. In this complex piece of work his approach to the use of ready made theory and other sources of knowledge enabled him not only to develop an overview of their situation, but also to respond flexibly to their individual needs while working towards the goal they had identified:

> It was one of the most complicated pieces of work I've done. I don't think anyone in the office expected her to be able to leave care. In fact several people when they heard I'd been allocated this case said I'd been taken a loan of because there was no chance of doing any work there. What helped me there though was this idea I talked about earlier that you can use more than one theory without losing sight of what you're working towards, which was to get this family, not just back together, but able to live together too. Now, to do that the mother and daughter had to be able to see each other's point of view a lot more than they did, but there were things blocking that so my idea was to work with them both as individuals and use the family meetings to bring it all together. ... That's where the objective stance I talked about paid off. Because I was working with them both as individuals it would have been quite easy I think to get drawn in, but I was clear and they were clear that I was there to help them talk to each other. ... I'm fairly pleased with the way it worked. She's been back at home for two weeks now, which nobody thought was possible. I'm pretty sure they'll still have a lot of ups and downs. I think they'll still need quite a bit of support, but I don't think she'll be back in care again. (Final

placement student)

In these cases, then, the students' approach to helping the people with whom they worked was largely synonymous with their approach to obtaining and interpreting information. In two further cases, however, the students concerned had combined the skills associated with the fluent approach with some more direct ways of helping. In contrast with the interventions associated with the deployment of theory as recipes for practice, these ways of helping were not derived directly from the ready made theories which had guided their initial approach. Rather, in keeping with the ways in which they constructed custom made theories to explain the situations they described, the students had devised ways of helping the people with whom they worked which were tailored to their specific situation. One student had employed a task centred approach in helping her client regain control of her financial affairs as a prelude to exploring with her the reasons behind her loss of control. As her response to a question about the strengths of her approach indicates, the student did not regard these two approaches as mutually exclusive. Instead she regarded them as approaches which both made sense in terms of her developing overview of her client's situation:

> I think being able to combine the two things, the financial problems and the relationship problems. I think in the past I wouldn't have spent much time on the financial problems. I would probably have sorted that out for her so we could get onto the things I thought were important. The way it worked out was good, because it gave me some indication of how capable she could be, and it gave her some back some control. I think that was important when it came to the other problems, because she'd already seen that she could achieve something. (First placement student)

As a second extract from her account illustrates, the student thought that her combined approach had enabled her client to to find new ways of addressing her problems:

> I knew I was almost finished when she told me she'd had a long talk with her boyfriend. She'd been able to tell him what she wanted from their relationship and what she expected of him as a father, that he couldn't just come and go as he pleased. I knew then I was almost finished, because she'd actually asserted herself for the first time and said what *she* wanted.

In another case the student concerned had also combined the skills associated with the fluent approach with some more direct ways of helping:

> The thing I was most pleased about was that they'd done it for themselves. What I'd done was to make sure everyone who wanted to could have a say, and perhaps there was a bit of modelling in that because some people had begun to speak out more themselves when she was dominating the procedings. Also I think they'd begun to see that by using procedures like agendas everyone could see, they could make sure things weren't being rushed through or skipped according to one person's whim. The idea of holding elections, though, that was their own idea. They organised it themselves, and even though she was re-elected at that stage, I knew that was a beginning. When I left the AGM I thought that's it, it's their group now, not hers. It took a few more weeks but I think it was that feeling that they could do something about it which eventually made them able to challenge her and insist that she retract what she'd written or resign. (First placement student)

In contrast with the fragmented approach, then, in the context of this approach the students were not dependent solely on the ways in which the people with whom they worked understood and responded to the situations they were in. Neither, however, did they expect them to cooperate unquestioningly in the kind of interventions which seemed rule book fashion to fit. Instead they created opportunities for the people concerned to explore their situations, and enabled them, in some cases by combining more direct ways of helping with their exploratory approach, to become clearer about and find ways of addressing the problems or needs involved. Having done so, however, they did not assume that the people concerned needed no further help. Rather, as this extract illustrates, they were concerned to explore the implications and to offer support when it seemed likely to be needed:

> I could see how pleased they were with what they'd done, and I didn't want to undermine that. All the same, I was aware that this could be a bit of a honeymoon period and that if he started behaving badly again they might need quite a bit of support to keep going. What I did was, I suggested that because things were so much better we could maybe meet once a fortnight instead of once a week to review how things were going. Then if they felt things were ok at the end of six weeks we could look at ending it. (Final placement student)

Further support for the view that the skills associated with the fluent approach played some part in enabling the students worked to be of assistance to the people with whom they worked emerges from three accounts which were somewhat less typical of the approach. In each of these three cases the students concerned had come up against the kind of problems which were

associated with the deployment of theory as recipes for practice, but had been able to resolve those problems by bringing into play some of the skills associated with the fluent approach. In one case the student concerned had initially approached her work with a family from a systemic perspective. In common with many other students she had found that she was unable to secure the cooperation of all members of the family. Rather than abandoning her original perspective, however, she had treated the failure of her attempt at family work as a source of information in the light of which she had adapted and extended her ideas:

> One of the things I've realised is that you can use a theory without having to act it out. It was becoming increasingly obvious that this family simply couldn't work together. They literally could not sit in the same room and concentrate on anything for more than two minutes. Then he started not coming to meetings and she was coming on her own with the children. Finally it dawned on me: this family are telling us something. That's when we agreed that I'd work alone with the mother instead of it just happening. I think in the past I would have dropped the systemic approach at that stage and gone back to the more therapeutic sort of approach I was familiar with, but what I learnt was that you can do both. ... I think a lot of the learning was about the value of the therapeutic relationship, not in the sense of making wonderful interpretations, which I think is what I'd thought it was about, but just being with someone, listening quietly, holding is the word that comes to mind. But within that relationship I could use the systems theory to look at it with her. ... It's this business of empowering again. Thinking about her very depressed state, there was no sense of control over what was happening to her and the kids. It was trying to break that down a bit into what's good for you, what's good for him, what's bad for you, what's bad for him. I think that helped her to see herself in a less passive light. Certainly she's a different woman now from the depressed, cowed person she was. She got her own tenancy a couple of weeks ago, and she's planning to move out with the kids at the weekend. I'll find out next week whether she has actually moved, but I think she will. If she doesn't it's not a disaster. We can use that to look again at what's keeping her in the relationship, what she might want to change. (Final placement student)

In another case the student concerned had been able to overcome the problems she experienced in undertaking development work by adapting her methods to take into account the perspective of the other professionals involved:

> I'll tell you, I was very idealistic about it to begin with. I thought they were just going to fall at my feet. Then I started thinking why are they like this, and I think it's partly a defence you know, working with sick children they're under a lot of

> stress. ... I think that came from the reading but also when I worked with mentally handicapped people, I had my own defences and I was really conscious of them. The things they said too. One nurse said, about the children crying you know, she said you get as hard as nails. Also one of the nurses in ENT, she said to me they're seen as baddies, and I think that's true. They're seen as baddies by the children and by the doctors. So I started thinking, how can I show them without making them feel like baddies. The way I did it was I asked them to keep a diary in the ward to pass on information about play so I wasn't coming in at the back of them duplicating their work. Which was true, because that was happening, that some children were getting a lot of attention and others got none. That worked well. They write in it every day so they're thinking about what they're doing. I think it's the sort of thing they're used to doing anyway, it fits in with their routines and all. (Final placement student)

The third student described how he had been able to resolve the problems he had encountered in implementing a task centred approach by augmenting this method of intervention with an analysis of his negative feelings about his client's failure to cooperate:

> The main thing I've learned from this work is that thing about how you can use your feelings. Every week I'd go round and find he'd done nothing he was supposed to do. He'd meet me at the door with yet another sheaf of brown envelopes and expect me to sort it out. I was getting very irritated by it. Nothing I suggested seemed to make any difference and I was beginning to think there wasn't a lot of point to going on with it. It was the theory that helped me there. I was doing some reading about transference and all that, so I was standing back and looking at it in a more general way. I could see how the way he was making me feel might be a reflection of the way he was feeling: powerless and threatened. Once I'd seen that I could see how to deal with it. That's where the idea of taking the one down position came in. It was honest too, it wasn't just a ploy. What I did was the next time he met me with a pile of bills I told him I was stuck, I'd tried everything I could think of and I was stuck. He said you're a lot of use aren't you? But the next time I went round he'd been on the phone to the lawyer and the bank, and he was sorting it out. ... No thanks to you, was how he put it but that didn't worry me, because it meant he was left feeling he'd done it himself. And he had. (First placement student)

There is some evidence, then, in the accounts which have been the focus of this discussion that the cognitive and interpersonal skills associated with the fluent approach played some part in enabling the students to be of assistance to the people with whom they worked. Many questions remain, however, about whether this approach can be described as a more effective approach than the everyday social and fragmented approaches. These questions will be discussed in the following chapter. First the main features of the fluent approach will be

summarised.

Summary

The approach to practice described in this chapter was differentiated from the fragmented approach on the basis of the students' approach to the use of theoretical and other sources of knowledge in making sense of the situations they described. In contrast with the conflicts of knowledge which were the hallmark of the fragmented approach, in the context of this approach the students drew on ready made theories and other sources of understanding in constructing custom made theories to explain the situations they described. A range of cognitive and interpersonal skills have been seen to underpin their ability to construct this type of theory. These include:

- An ability to listen and actively make sense of information as it emerged in the course of an interaction.

- An ability to develop ideas by drawing not only on different ready made theories but also on other sources of knowledge to compliment and augment each other.

- An ablity to communicate and discuss ideas with the people concerned.

These cognitive and interpersonal skills appear to have enabled the students to overcome the conflicts of knowledge from which the problems associated with the fragmented approach stemmed. In turn, the construction of custom made theories to explain the particular situations they described was associated with an ability to arrive at an overall understanding of those situations which was unique to the fluent approach. Equally, from the students' perspective at least, their skills had enabled them to be of assistance to the people with whom they worked.

Chapter 9
SOME PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDENTS' PRACTICE

Introduction

In the following two chapters of the thesis the information which emerged from the students' accounts about the influence of their educational experiences on the development of their practice will be discussed. In order to lay the groundwork for this discussion some preliminary questions will be addressed here. These concern the extent to which the development of a fluent approach to practice can be regarded as representing a desirable educational objective, and the part which might have been played by the students' own background characteristics in the development of their practice.

9.1. The Question of Educational Objectives

It will be argued in the following chapters that some aspects of the students' educational experiences appear to have been more helpful than others in enabling them to develop the cognitive and interpersonal skills which were the hallmark of the fluent approach. Underlying this argument, however, is an assumption that the development of a fluent approach represents a desirable educational objective. The basis of this assumption therefore requires some clarification.

As has been seen in earlier chapters, defining the achievement of objectives in the field of social work education is both a controversial issue, in view of the debates which surround the nature and purpose of social work, and a complex matter involving questions not only about the extent to which students are able to make use of course content in practice, but also about the effectiveness of their work. It has already been seen that it proved impossible to properly assess the effectiveness of the different approaches to practice described in the preceding chapters within the scope of this research, and that the main focus of the research is therefore on the use of course content in practice. In turn, the assumption that the development of a fluent approach to practice

represents a desirable educational objective rests not on any firm conclusions about the effectiveness of this approach in comparison with others, but on the extent to which the students were able to make use of course content in practice. In order to clarify this position the limitations of the information available about the effectiveness of the three approaches identified in the course of the research will be discussed first. The basis of the assumption which underpins the approach taken in the following chapters will then be outlined.

On the surface of things, the information presented in the preceding chapters appears to suggest that, in comparison with the other two approaches identified in the course of the research, the fluent approach was a more effective approach. As was seen in the previous chapter, the students themselves were very much happier with what they were able to achieve in the context of this approach than in the context of other approaches. For two reasons, however, it cannot be assumed that the fluent approach was in fact more effective than other approaches.

Firstly, it cannot be assumed that more could have been achieved in those cases where the students deployed an everyday social or a fragmented approach had they deployed a fluent approach instead. One illustration concerns the different needs and problems of the people with whom the students worked. As was seen in Chapter Six, the remit of some of those students who had deployed an everyday social approach had been to provide support for people whose needs were associated with aging or mental illness. Although the students concerned experienced particular difficulties in undertaking this type of work it cannot be assumed that a fluent approach would have been more helpful either for them or the people concerned. It may be the case, for example, that the skills associated with the fluent approach were directed too much towards problem solving to be of assistance in undertaking this type of work. Certainly Wilkes (1981) puts forward a cogent argument to the effect that an emphasis within social work on problem solving has led to the devaluing of people like the elderly and handicapped for whose problems no solution is available. Moreover, even in those cases where the students' remit more directly involved problem solving it cannot be assumed that the problems in question were of equal complexity. It may be the case, for example, that some of the problems encountered by the students were more intractable than others, or that their resolution required a longer period of

social work involvement than the students themselves were able to provide.

Secondly, although the students themselves were much happier with what they had been able to achieve in the context of the fluent approach, the opinion of the people concerned remains uknown. One way of augmenting the information available in this respect is, however, suggested by Lishman (1988, p.3), who proposes that research findings which are in themselves inconclusive can be viewed with more confidence if they are consonant with predictions in the literature. In relation to this research, it was thought that the findings of those researchers who have sought to obtain clients' views about social work might shed some light on how the different approaches to practice described in the previous chapters were likely to be perceived by the people concerned. From the work of these researchers it emerged that two aspects of the fluent approach in particular would appear to have some consonance with approaches which clients appreciate and which are associated, in their opinion, with effective practice. The relevant findings will therefore be examined here. It will be seen, however, that further research is required before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

The strongest theme to emerge from those studies which have sought to obtain clients' views about social work concerns the need for mutual understanding. The finding first reported by Mayer and Timms (1970), that clashes of perspective between worker and client about the definition of problems and about ways of dealing with them are a major source of dissatisfaction amongst clients, has been consistently supported by the findings of other researchers. On the basis of an analysis of British, North American and Australian studies of client perspectives Rees and Wallace (1981) conclude similarily that clashes of perspective are a significant source of dissatisfaction. Sainsbury et al. (1982), who studied the work undertaken by forty seven social workers with seventy four families over the course of a year, Lishman (1988), who explored the relationship between the interviewing behaviour of nine social workers and the outcomes of twenty two of their cases, and Howe (1989), who explored the perspectives of thirty two families who had been offered family therapy, all concur.

This growing body of evidence that clashes of perspective between worker and client are a significant source of dissatisfaction suggests that the approach of those students who attempted to deploy theory as recipes for practice was

likely to be found unhelpful by the people with whom they worked. It also suggests that the students' persistent efforts in the context of the fluent approach to understand the perspective of the people with whom they worked and to be understood in turn may have been found helpful. On the other hand it cannot be assumed that the students did in fact achieve the degree of mutual understanding they thought was achieved. It may be the case, for example, that the students misinterpreted the extent to which ideas were shared and mutually understood, or that they interpreted passive acquiescence as a more whole hearted cooperation. Certainly Howe (1989) reports cases where families who were described by their social worker/therapist as cooperative and willing to engage in therapy said themselves that they had been bewildered by the process, or had simply gone along with what seemed to be expected of them.

A second theme to emerge from these studies of clients' perspectives on social work concerns the balance required between the establishment and maintenance of a warm relationship and a more proactive approach to the pursuit of other goals. On the basis of their analysis of research in this area Rees and Wallace suggest that while clients very much appreciate personal skills and attributes in their social workers which convey a caring, friendly approach, these attributes are only perceived to be helpful up to a point. In addition, specialised knowledge and expertise are also highly valued. The authors conclude that social workers require two repertoires of skills, which they characterise as those of a caring person and those of a competent professional.

Sainsbury et al. draw a similar conclusion. They found that after a year of contact with social workers a lack of purpose was identified as a problem by two thirds of the families they interviewed, and that in many of these cases anxieties which had abated in the earlier stages of the work being undertaken had returned. The authors attribute these findings to an approach on the part of the social workers concerned which appears very similar to the pattern described in Chapter Seven as one involving the hindsight deployment of theory, in that it was characterised by a tendancy to conceal ideas and aims and to rely instead on encouraging clients to ventilate their feelings. Sainsbury et al. conclude that while a "good relationship" is essential for effective practice it is not enough in itself, and that social workers also require an ability to define tasks and enhance social functioning in more specific ways.

In view of these findings, the balance achieved in the context of the fluent approach between the establishment of a warm relationship and a more proactive approach to raising and exploring potentially relevant issues appears likely to be associated with the kind of approach which clients find helpful. Other studies suggest, however, that in the absence of any information about the views of the people with whom the students worked this cannot be assumed to be the case. Howe (1989, pp. 101–102), cites one North American study, reported by Jones (1985), which suggests that in some circumstances a more proactive approach may be unhelpful. In the course of an evaluation of a project designed to prevent children being received into care through the provision of extensive services to families, Jones concluded that well qualified social workers were less effective than other workers because they were more inclined to engage in task oriented or therapeutically intense types of intervention. While this kind of approach seems to have more in common with the deployment of theory as recipes for practice than with the fluent approach, Jones' findings raise again the question of whether, in some circumstances, the problem solving orientation of the fluent approach might have been less helpful than other approaches.

This reservation is reinforced by Lishman's study of the effectiveness of interviewing approaches. While Lishman found, as she expected on the basis of the relevant literature, that behaviours associated with the establishment of a warm relationship such as nodding, smiling and offering encouragement were associated with outcomes which were defined as successful by both workers and clients, a successful outcome did not depend in addition on the kind of behaviours associated with a more proactive approach. Lishman's comparison of her findings with those of previous studies is not unproblematic in that she is not clear, in this published account of her findings, about the time scale of the work in question, and it may be that the work was undertaken over too short a period of time for the problems described by other researchers to surface. Nevertheless, when taken together with Jones' findings, her study reinforces the need for further research before any conclusions can be drawn about the relative effectiveness of the three approaches to practice identified in the course of this research.

In view of this conclusion, the assumption which underpins the following chapters of this thesis, that the development of a fluent approach represents a desirable educational objective, rests not on any firm conclusions about the

relative effectiveness of the approach, but on the extent to which the students were able to make use of course content in practice. The position taken is that it was only in the context of the fluent approach that the students were able to sustain work based, though by no means exclusively, on the kind of theoretical explanations for situations, ways of managing social work interactions and principles of practice which constitute a significant proportion of the social work curriculum. Despite the uncertainty which remains about the relative effectiveness of the three approaches to practice identified in the course of the research it seems legitimate, on these grounds, to examine the part played in the development of the students' practice by their educational experiences. In doing so, however, further questions are raised about the extent to which the students own background characteristics may also have played a part in the development of their practice. What information is available in this respect will be examined in the course of the following discussion.

9.2. The Students' Background Characteristics

Within the field of social work education the long standing debates outlined in Chapter One about the nature and purpose of social work and about the type of training required have been accompanied by discussion of the sort of background characteristics which might be advantageous to students. While it is not intended to detail these discussions here, it can be noted that age and length of previous experience, academic qualifications and the academic subjects studied prior to training are all regarded as potentially relevant factors which continue to be reflected in the requirements for entry to courses published by CCETSW (1990).

Although no research appears to have been undertaken in Britain to substantiate or refute the assumptions on which the different entry requirements listed in this document are based, a number of North American studies have sought to discover the extent to which students' characteristics predict success in training. The findings of these studies are, however, inconsistent, even where similar definitions of success have been used. For example, neither Leon (1970) nor Stein et al. (1974) found any correlation

between previous academic achievement and practice teachers' [1] ratings of students' fieldwork. On the other hand, Pfouts and Henley (1977) and Cunningham (1982) found a significant positive correlation between these variables. Equally, while Torre (1974), Pfouts and Henley and Carroll (1983) all found that older, more experienced students received higher ratings from practice teachers than younger, less experienced students, Cunningham reports that amongst her sample it was the youngest, least experienced students who received the highest ratings. It seems likely that the explanation for these conflicting findings lies at least in part in differences in the rating scales employed. Only Torre appears to have examined the relationship between the academic subjects previously studied by social work students and success in training. She found no correlation between the subjects studied and either practice teachers' ratings or students' scores on a problem solving test.

Both the small samples involved in this research and the exploratory nature of the study precluded the kind of rigourous statistical analysis carried out by these North American researchers. Any conclusions drawn about the relationship between the students' background characteristics and the development of their practice are therefore extremely tentative and of relevance in any case only to the students concerned. Despite these limitations, what information is available is of some interest and will be examined here.

Clearly, since they were all graduates, the previous academic achievements of the students who took part in this research represent only a narrow band of achievement. The level of degree obtained by the students might, nevertheless, be thought to have some bearing on the development of their practice, in view of the fact that the fluent approach was characterised by a range of cognitive as well as interpersonal skills. What information is available, however, does not support this proposition, since the level of degree obtained by the six students who had developed a fluent approach by the end of training spanned the range obtained by the students who took part in the research. One of the six students

---

[1]The terminology employed to describe this form of teaching in the United States differs from that employed in Britain. Changes in the British terminology have also occurred over the past decade or so. Throughout the present discussion, and in the following chapters, the current British terminology is used.

had obtained an ordinary degree, [2] one had obtained a third class degree, two a lower second and two an upper second. As was noted in Chapter Four, none of the students who took part in the research had obtained a first class degree.

Similarly, previous study of three academic subjects thought relevant for social work - sociology, psychology and social policy - does not appear to have been advantageous, since five of the six students who developed a fluent approach had studied none of these subjects. Moreover, those students who had previously studied these subjects did not regard them as a source of direct assistance in undertaking the work they described, although some students did indicate that their previous study of sociology had played a part in the development of a particular ideological stance. Interestingly, one student who developed a fluent approach to practice did indicate that her degree in a rather different subject had been of more direct assistance to her. This student consistently referred to her degree in geology in describing how she had made sense of the process of her work. Clearly it would be ludicrous to suggest on this basis that preference be given in considering applications for post graduate training to people with degrees in geology. What is of interest, however, is the ability of this student to transfer learning between such diverse subjects. This suggests, though it is by no means certain, that she may have entered training with a headstart in developing the cognitive skills associated with the fluent approach. Overall, however, both her accounts and those of the other students who had developed a fluent approach suggest that other factors associated with their educational experiences were more important than any advantages associated with their previous academic experience.

As far as their age and previous experiences of practice were concerned, the students' accounts suggest that both the youngest, least experienced students, and the older, more experienced students could experience difficulties which may have had some bearing on the development of their practice. Despite deliberate efforts to include in the research students who were both younger and less experienced than average, and students who were older and more experienced, the numbers involved remain small. Only two students were under twenty four at the beginning of training and had less than two years

---

[2] It should be noted that this student had obtained her degree from a Scottish university where a further year of study is required for an honours degree.

experience, while only five were over thirty and had more than five years experience. Of these students, only one older, more experienced student had developed a fluent approach to practice by the end of training. That the other students did not do so may well be the result of factors other than their age and length of experience. Nevertheless their age and length of experience appears to have played some part at least in some of the problems they encountered.

As far as the two youngest, least experienced students are concerned, these students both indicated that they had entered training lacking in confidence and feeling disadvantaged by their inexperience. At the end of the first year of training they also reported that they had found it very difficult to make much sense of the theoretical material presented during the year because, as one student put it: " If you don't have the experience to link it to it doesn't mean anything." During their first placement the way in which both students had approached their work had been very typical of the everyday social approach. By the end of training, although they had both moved beyond this approach in some respects, they had continued to rely largely on personal responses in making sense of the situations they described. Although it is clearly impossible to base any firm conclusions on the accounts of two students, what information is available suggests that these students may have entered training with disadvantages relating to their relative lack of experience.

The accounts of the older, more experienced students suggest that they too could, in some circumstances, experience particular difficulties. Amongst these students, three students experienced problems in relation to practice teaching which may have been associated, at least in part, with their own approach to supervision. These students indicated that they had found it hard to adapt to being a student after being employed for a number of years. In turn, their own focus in undertaking their placement work, particularly during their first placement, had been on "getting on with the work" rather than on learning. As a result they had tended not to reveal their learning needs in supervision. As one student put it: "I tried, I hope I succeeded, to maintain a confident front, although I was far from confident underneath." The students' difficulties in this respect were not dissimilar from those identified by Dingwall (1977) amongst older, more experienced health visitor students. That two of the older, more experienced students who took part in this research do not appear to have experienced the same difficulties seems to have been associated in one case

with personal problems which had sapped the student's confidence, and in the other case with a strong personal orientation to learning.

On the basis of what information is available, then, it may be the case that some students entered training with disadvantages associated with their age and length of previous experience. The accounts of these students suggest, however, that factors associated with their education and training were also a significant influence on the development of their practice. Before going on to examine the part played by these factors the main points which have been made here will be summarised.

Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to address some questions of relevance to the development of the students' practice in order to lay the groundwork for discussion in the following chapters of the influence of their education and training. The questions addressed revolve around two main themes. Firstly, the basis of an assumption that the development of a fluent approach to practice represents a desirable educational objective has been clarified. It has been seen that this assumption rests not on any certain knowledge about the effectiveness of this approach in comparison with other approaches, but on the extent to which the students were able to make use of course content in practice. Secondly, the question of the part played by the students' own background characteristics in the development of their practice has been considered. What information emerges from the students' accounts in this respect suggests, albeit inconclusively, that one student may have entered training with a headstart as far as the development of cognitive skills was concerned, while others may have been disadvantaged by factors relating to their age and length of previous experience.

Chapter 10
THE INFLUENCE OF ACADEMIC TEACHING

Introduction

In the context of the sort of exploratory, interpretative study described here it is not possible to draw hard and fast conclusions about the part played in the development of the students' practice by their education and training, in the sense of ascribing particular effects to specific causes with absolute certainty. This limitation is compounded in relation to the part played by academic teaching on the students' course, because it proved more difficult to make direct links between their experiences of this aspect of their education and training and the three approaches to practice identified in the course of the research than was the case with their placement experiences.

The most likely explanation for this difficulty derives from the fact that the students' experiences of academic teaching were, from their perspective, inevitably less closely bound up with the work they undertook while on placement than were their placement experiences. As a result, although their responses to questions about what had contributed to their work suggest a close association between some aspects of academic course content and the development of their practice, in other respects the links are more tenuous because they depend on responses to more direct questions about their experiences of academic teaching. For two reasons these responses are not unproblematic. Firstly, they tend to cluster around areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and it is not possible to to be certain of the extent to which students' satisfaction can be equated with the development of their practice. Secondly, they raise questions about the ways in which adults learn which it was outwith the scope of this research to properly address. However, as with other questions which it was not possible to address more directly, a comparison of the information obtained in the course of this research with the work of previous writers and researchers suggests that some very tentative conclusions might be drawn. It is the aim of this chapter to present these tentative conclusions.

In the first section of the chapter the findings reported by previous researchers who have sought to obtain social work students' views about their education and training will be examined. In the second and third sections the information generated by this research will then be presented and discussed in the light of the work of other writers and researchers who have addressed the ways in which adults learn. The second section will focus on aspects of course content which the students' accounts suggest were of assistance to them, while the third section will focus on aspects of the teaching approaches employed which appear to have been either helpful or unhelpful.

10.1. Students' Perspectives on Social Work Training

Two widely cited surveys of former social work students' views about the adequacy of their education and training as a preparation for practice suggest that many social workers remain unconvinced about the relevance of academic teaching. In order to explore further the "gap" between theory and practice identified in the course of their interviews with area team and hospital social workers Stevenson and Parsloe (DHSS, 1978) employed a postal questionnaire to obtain the views of 131 students at the end of training and after nine months in their first qualified posts. The researchers report that while their respondents were generally satisfied with their education and training, their satisfaction was associated more with their practice placements than with academic teaching (p.384). Similarly Davies (1984, p.16) reports that amongst a national sample of social workers who had been qualified for three years practice placements were the most enjoyed aspect of training, were thought to be marginally better taught, and were deemed to be the most useful. When asked to choose which of a range of proposed changes would most enhance the quality of training 50% of Davies' respondents indicated that the quality of teaching in academic institutions should be improved and made more relevant to practice.

As Stevenson and Parsloe acknowledge (p.393) surveys of this type inevitably sacrifice depth in favour of breadth, and neither their survey nor Davies' was designed to address in any detail the question of why academic teaching was thought to be less relevant or how it might be improved. Two further surveys, undertaken from rather different perspectives by Cox (1982) and Gibbs and Gygno (1986), do, however, provide some clues, in that both studies suggest

that the use of traditional teaching approaches within academic institutions may account for some measure of student dissatisfaction.

Rather than seeking the retrospective views of qualified social workers, Cox sought to examine the educational expectations of 181 beginning students, taking Bernstein's theory of the classification and framing of knowledge as his starting point. According to Cox, Bernstein distinguished between two approaches to the classification and framing of knowledge which he terms the "collection" and "integrated" codes. While the former involves a traditional, hierarchically structured approach within which the authority of the teacher is paramount, the latter is described as a more personal approach within which emphasis is placed on the relationship between teacher and student, and on the uncertainty and ambiguity of the educational undertaking.

For his own purposes, Cox based descriptions of four educational styles, which he terms "academic", "expert", "personal" and "apprentice" styles, on these contrasting approaches to the classification and framing of knowledge. He then asked beginning students to rank them according to their appropriateness for social work education. He reports that the strongest preference was for educational styles which tended towards the integrated code, and that little support was expressed for the more traditional collection code (p.392). Cox's development of four distinct educational styles on the basis of Bernstein's two codes seems rather confusing, and the connection between these two ways of conceptualising educational approaches is unclear. On the basis of his findings Cox concludes, however, that there may be a mismatch between students' expectations and the educational approaches they encounter during training.

The survey carried out by Gibbs and Cygno also suggests that more traditional academic approaches may account for some measure of student dissatisfaction. While the studies so far outlined here have focussed exclusively on courses leading to the CQSW, Gibbs and Cygno sought to compare the views of CQSW and CSS holders. They report that the great majority of the CSS holders questioned thought their training highly relevant for their present posts. In contrast, less than half the CQSW holders thought similarly. Equally, while the great majority of CSS holders thought their course had achieved the right balance between academic and practical work, one third of the CQSW holders thought their course had been too academic. Gibbs and Cygno conclude (p.306) that the greater integration of education and practice achieved by the CSS

curriculum, together with its more "job specific" focus and a greater emphasis on focussed skills training, must account, at least in part, for these differences of opinion.

While these four studies, taken together, point in the direction of problems in the area of academic teaching which may be associated with the use of traditional teaching approaches, survey methods are able to provide only limited information. In the first place it is not possible to be certain that respondents and researchers share the same understanding of terms such as "useful" or "relevant". Moreover, it remains unclear what bearing if any the different educational activities and approaches considered have on the development of students' practice. In the case of Gibbs and Cygno's survey, for example, it is perhaps unsurprising that CSS holders thought their course more relevant, since CSS courses focus largely on students' ongoing experiences of practice in posts to which they return full time after training. It cannot be assumed, however, that these respondents' approaches to their work changed during or as a result of training.

Although the conclusions which can be drawn in this respect on the basis of the information generated by this research also remain very tentative, they have some consonance with the findings of these surveys. Like the social workers questioned by both Stevenson and Parsloe and Davies, the students who took part in the research were very much less satisfied with academic teaching on their course than with their practice placements. Equally, as both Cox and Gibbs and Cygno suggest, their dissatisfaction was closely associated with a perceived emphasis on traditional teaching approaches. In addition, however, the students' accounts suggest that an emphasis on traditional approaches may have imposed limitations on the extent to which course content was of assistance in relation to the development of their practice. This is not to suggest that academic teaching was of no assistance to the students whatsoever. On the contrary, their accounts suggest that some aspects both of course content and of the teaching approaches employed were helpful to them. These will be examined alongside some less helpful aspects in the course of the following discussion.

10.2. Helpful Aspects of Course Content

The students' accounts suggest that four aspects of course content had been of assistance in relation to the development of their practice. The first concerns the teaching provided on human development and family work. As was seen in Chapter Seven, the theoretical explanations to which the students most commonly referred in the course of their accounts were psychodynamic explanations of human development and explanations associated with a systemic perspective on family work. Although some students indicated that previous experiences of practice or practice teachers had been their main source of information about these explanations, the great majority indicated that academic teaching during the first year of their course had been either an additional or a main source of information. The significance attributed to this teaching by the students revolved around their perception that it had given them words for or otherwise heightened their awareness of facets of the social world which they had previously taken for granted or given little consideration. This student's response to a question about whether her ideas would have been any different before the course provides an illustation:

> The ideas might have been there, but I wouldn't have had the labels. I wouldn't have used words like "dynamic", it would just have been a couple. The ideas might have been there, but because I didn't have the labels they wouldn't have been as explicit so I wouldn't have thought of discussing them.

This explanation of the influence of academic teaching during the first year of their course was echoed by most of the students who took part in the research, suggesting that this teaching had played a significant part in enabling them to move beyond the kind of unquestioning approach which has been described as an everyday social approach.

The students' accounts also suggest that a second area of teaching had been influential in enabling them to move beyond the everyday social approach. This was the provision at the beginning of their course of teaching related to principles of practice. The students attributed to this teaching, in conjunction with the first essay they were required to submit, a heightened awareness of the values on which they based their approach to their work. For example:

> It's this self determination thing in a way. I suppose it's been hanging around for years but it suddenly comes up. I think the lectures and the first essay were very good for that. I think the way I used to work, it was "we'll solve their problems and

then give them a bit of self determination", whereas it's come to me a lot more that they've got as much right to be involved in solving them.

As was seen in Chapter Seven, a heightened awareness of values, reflected in the students' references to the principles of practice to which they aspired, was one of the features which distinguished the fragmented approach from the everyday social approach. In this respect the students' accounts of the influence of their education and training concur with the conclusion drawn by Wright (1985) on the basis of a review of research in this area, that rather than inculcating new values social work training develops an already established value base.

In addition to their heightened awareness of principles of practice, the students also attributed to teaching during the first year of their course a heightened awareness of other ways in which social work interactions might be managed, for example the ways in which questions might be phrased in exploring clients' situations. Responses such as this to questions about changes in their interviewing skills suggest that in this respect too academic teaching had been influential in enabling the students to move beyond the everyday social approach:

Student: I think that's the kind of thing that's like conversation anyway. I think a lot of it's intuitive, picking up cues. I think the difference is it was a lot more structured than it would have been before. The course makes you a lot more conscious about what you're doing.

J.S.: Can you give me an example?

Student: Open questions! Keeping it open. It was a different sort of interview. I think I would have been a lot more talkative before the course. In a way it's been separating me the very talkative, me the personal and getting a bit more professional here, the social worker. Whereas before it's been "let's all have a conversation", this was "we're having an interview here and it's got to have some structure".

While the closeness of the association between those aspects of course content so far discussed and the development of the students' practice in the earlier stages of their education and training emerged fairly clearly from their accounts, the influence of a fourth area covered during the first year of their course emerged even more clearly. This concerned their approach to ending their work. As was noted in Chapter Five, the ways in which the students

managed the endings of their work were set aside for discussion in this chapter because they were associated less with their different approaches to practice than with their stage of training. The clearest illustration emerges from the accounts of the eleven students who were interviewed at the beginning of training. Prior to training the majority of these students had experienced difficulty in ending their work. The only exceptions were two students who described time limited group work in the context of which the ending of a piece of work was planned well ahead of time. The other nine students had either left the people with whom they worked making promises to keep in touch which they had already realised were impossible to keep, or had left without saying goodbye at all. In either case the students were unhappy about the way their work had ended and this was high on their own agenda of issues they wanted to tackle during their education and training. In this respect their course appears to have served them well, since by the end of their first placement all eleven students had developed an approach to ending their work which they found helpful and which they attributed to teaching on their course.

To summarise this approach, the students were concerned from the early stages of their work to be clear with the people with whom they worked about the timescale of their work. As the time for leaving approached they began to discuss the implications with them in more detail, and in the course of their final meeting they were at pains to review the work which had been undertaken, placing emphasis first on the positive aspects and then, where it seemed appropriate, on further work which might be undertaken in the future. This approach was described at the end of their first placement not only by the eleven students who were interviewed at the beginning of training, but also by the other ten students who took part in the research. All nineteen students who were interviewed towards the end of their final placement had again adopted a similar approach to ending the work they described at this stage, and it would therefore appear to be an approach which, once learnt, was not forgotten.

Given the uniformity of the students' approach to ending their work once they had begun training, the only difference in this respect between the different approaches to practice identified in the course of the research was one of tone rather than substance. In short, in the context of the fragmented approach the students not infrequently experienced difficulty or discomfort when attempting to sum up the positive aspects of their work with the people concerned, because they themselves were dissatisfied with what they had achieved.

In contrast with those aspects of course content which have been discussed here, two aspects were singled out by the students as particularly disappointing. These were the teaching provided about group work and about issues relating to race and gender. Because the students' concerns about teaching in these areas were closely bound up with their experiences of the teaching approaches employed they will be examined in the course of the following discussion.

10.3. Unhelpful and Helpful Teaching Approaches

As was noted earlier, the students' accounts suggest that a perceived emphasis on traditional teaching approaches had imposed limitations on the extent to which they were able to make use of course content in practice. This is not to suggest that their teachers used only traditional teaching approaches. On the contrary, both the course outline provided for students and the students' own descriptions of their experiences provide considerable evidence that a variety of teaching approaches were employed. From the students' perspective, however, the balance was weighted in favour of more traditional approaches which appear to have been of limited help to them in integrating course content with other sources of knowledge and in developing the interpersonal skills required to make use of course content in practice. The main problems encountered by the students in this respect concern the volume and organisation of the information presented, a perceived emphasis on the lecture as a vehicle for presenting information, and, as a corollary of the latter, a lack of attention to their own experience, values and attitudes. Each of these problematic areas will be considered here in turn before going on to examine the students' experiences of some of the other teaching approaches discussed in the course of the research interviews.

10.3.1. The volume and organisation of information

As was seen in Chapter One, the problems posed for social work educators by the volume of material to be included in the curriculum have received considerable attention within the literature. Equally, a number of writers, for example Sainsbury (1982) and Haines (1985) have addressed the problems which might be posed for students. Although no research in this area appears to have been undertaken in the field of social work education itself, Gardiner

(1988) draws attention to a body of research undertaken in Sweden during the 1970s which has explored similar issues in the field of higher education more generally. Of particular interest here is one study cited by Gardiner (Svensson, 1976) which found that when students feel overburdened by the amount to be learnt they tend to use surface learning approaches involving the passive memorising and reproduction of facts, as opposed to deep learning approaches characterised by an active search for meaning in the material presented. While Gardiner himself emphasises that both surface and deep learning approaches may be required for different tasks, he also suggests that a surface approach is less appropriate in the context of professional education, where students are required not simply to memorise and reproduce knowledge, but to make use of that knowledge in practice. The accounts of the students who took part in this research support the conclusion that too great a volume of material to be learnt may lead to a surface approach.

As will be clear from the preceding discussion, those aspects of course content which the students' accounts suggest were helpful in relation to the development of their practice were derived from teaching during the first year of their course. Noticably absent from the majority of the students' accounts was any reference to the many areas covered during the second year of their course. This may be partly because much of this content was concerned with different client groups, with the result that some of the areas covered would inevitably be less directly relevant than others to the work described by each student. The students' responses at the end of training to more general questions about their experience of their course suggest in addition, however, that they had been overwhelmed by the amount of information provided during the two years of their course, and particularly during the second year. Comments such as "in the end you just give up trying to take it all in, you just do the minimum for the essays" were very common. This approach would appear to have some similarity to the surface learning approach described by Gardiner, suggesting that the volume of information presented by the students' course may have posed problems for them in making sense of that informaion, and hence in making use of it in practice.

Within the literature of social work education growing recognition of the problems involved for both teachers and students in coping with the volume of material to be encompassed within the curriculum has led to interest in innovatory curriculum designs. Sainsbury (1982), proposes, for example, that a

thematic approach within which generic problems are discussed in relation to different theoretical perspectives might help students to make use of theory in practice. More recently, Burgess and Jackson (1990) have described the introduction at Bristol University of a version of this kind of thematic approach which seems more radical than Sainsbury's proposal, in that it aims to involve students in actively defining their learning priorities and addressing them through a range of learning resources. As was seen in Chapter Two, other suggestions revolve around a concern to stimulate the inductive development of theory grounded in students' experiences of practice.

It will probably be apparent from the description provided in Chapter Four that the course which is the focus of this research was organised along more traditional lines, involving the division of the material taught into discrete subject areas or client groups. From the students' perspective, this type of curriculum design posed problems which may have compounded those involved in making sense of the volume of information presented. This student's description of her experience of her education and training provides an illustration of the kind of difficulties they described:

> I mean you get sociology thrown at you, you get psychology thrown at you, you get social policy thrown at you, you get human development thrown at you, and *then* you get twenty seven client groups thrown at you. Now there may be a lot of information there that's useful and valid, but there's no way of linking it together. It's all divided up separately and I find it difficult to learn from that. I needed a map, something to make it make sense.

In addition to the problems involved in making sense of the information presented on their course, it seems possible that the conceptual model implicit in the way that information was organised may have played a part in some cases in developing or perpetuating the absolutist conceptualisation of theory which was a hallmark of the fragmented approach. As was seen in Chapter Seven, in the context of this approach the students conceptualised the theoretical ideas to which they referred as discrete bodies of knowledge which in themselves offered either a correct or an incorrect explanation for the situations they described. From their perspective, however, this was the way in which the ideas to which they referred had been presented to them. As one student put it:

> There's no attempt made to look at why you might choose to believe one theory or another. It's an implausible model. None of these theories are watertight, yet they're taught as if they are.

The significance of individual comments of this kind was strengthened at the meeting held to obtain the students' views on the validity of the material presented in the preceding chapters. A request for their reactions to what is now Chapter Seven was met by a deluge of comments to the effect that "the course teaches theory as recipes for practice".

10.3.2. The lecture as a vehicle for presenting information

In common with traditional ways of organising the social work curriculum, the use of the lecture as a vehicle for presenting information has received attention within the literature of social work education from writers who have explored the relevance of educational principles and theories for this field. The consensus of opinion again appears to be that this teaching approach is associated with passive, reproductive approaches to learning which may be incompatible with the demands of social work practice. Harris (1985) suggests, for example, that teaching methods which demand more active approaches to learning will equip students more appropriately for practice:

> The demands of active learning are such as to avoid the worst elements of the master-pupil relationship, emphasising students' responsibility for finding solutions rather than being given them - a task more closely related to the demands of practice than passive learning. (p.87)

Although the course which is the focus of this research clearly recognised the value of more active learning approaches, in ways which will be considered shortly, the emphasis, from the students' perspective, remained on presenting information through the medium of lectures. An indication of the strength of this perception is contained in the fact that sixteen of the nineteen students who were interviewed at the end of training singled out an emphasis on lecturing as amongst the most disappointing features of their course. The difficulties involved in absorbing the amount of information presented by some lecturers, and the boredom of sitting and listening for the required amount of time were frequent complaints. The main thrust of the students' comments, however, concerned an important corollary of the perceived emphasis on lecturing, namely a lack of attention to their own experience, to their values and attitudes, and to the question of how they might make use of course content in practice. It will probably already be apparent that the students' concerns in relation to the use of course content in practice were wide spread,

and that the problems involved lay at the heart of the fragmentation of knowledge depicted in many of their accounts. To elaborate the point here therefore seems unnecessary. Their other concerns do, however, require some elaboration in order to draw out some possible implications for the development of their practice.

10.3.3. The students' own experiences, values and attitudes

The lack of attention paid to their own life and work experiences was a constantly recurring theme in the students' responses to questions about their education and training. From their perspective, academic teaching on their course had failed to help them to make sense of and build on this experience, and this, together with an emphasis on new learning, had left them feeling devalued and deskilled. The vehemence of this student's response to a question about her experience of the first year of her course was very striking, because throughout the preceding segments of the interview she had been quietly spoken and had talked at some length about her timidity and lack of confidence:

> I've learnt far more from my placement than from the school learning. I think through experiencing something I learn more, whereas the course dismisses your experience as if what went before wasn't important. "You're now back to learn how to do it properly", that's the attitude. Whereas a lot of what we were doing was good work, and it was important work, and it was hard work. Try telling them that. They pay lip service to it, but they don't listen.

The resentment expressed by this student was echoed by most of the students who took part in the research. Although it might be thought that these feelings would have subsided later in training as the students adapted to their role as learners this was not the case. Rather their feelings persisted to the end of training. In the words of three final placement students, they felt they had been treated "like kids", "like undergraduates", and "like empty slates, dummies with no experience of anything". In some cases the students' resentment had played a significant part in their rejection of theoretical ideas in favour of more everyday understandings. As was seen in Chapter Seven this led to a vicious circle within which an unstructured, atheoretical approach was legitmated on the grounds that there was little need to use theory in practice. More widespread, however, were the difficulties experienced by the majority of students who took part in the research in achieving an appropriate transfer of

learning. Within the literature of social work education Badger (1985) and Evans (1985), amongst others, have described attempts to enable students to transfer learning gained prior to training to the new situations they encounter during training. The accounts of the students who took part in this research suggest that this kind of approach might have been both welcome and beneficial.

In contrast with their concerns about the lack of attention paid to their own life and work experiences, which emerged at an early stage of their education and training, the students' concerns about the lack of attention paid to their values and attitudes did not emerge in most cases until the end of training. As has been seen, during the first year course content and written work relating to principles of practice had heightened their awareness of the values which underpinned their work, and at the end of their first placement most students expressed considerable satisfaction with this aspect of their course. By the end of training, however, the students were very much less satisfied. Their responses to questions about this aspect of their education and training suggest that while work in the first year on principles of practice had been greatly appreciated, its effect in the longer term had been to induce a comforting sense of the consonance of their values with those of their chosen profession which they later wished had been challenged. Although a series of seminars on social philosophy during the second year of their course had begun to provide the challenge they wanted, from the students' perspective this was too little too late. Amongst some more general concerns they were particularly concerned about the lack of attention paid to issues of gender and race. This student's feelings on the subject were widely shared:

> The most disappointing thing for me is that you're not challenged at all. It's as though we all come to the course wearing our nice social work values on our sleeves, and I expected to be challenged on that. We've had some good seminars this year on ethics, the tutor was good at playing devil's advocate and that was good, but it really only began to scratch the surface. In the other classes it's marginalised. Like the workshops on gender and race. They say it's implicit in everything on the course, but it isn't, it's marginalised.

While the students themselves expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of attention paid to their values and attitudes, some possible implications for their ability to negotiate the moral complexities of practice which had posed problems for many students, particularly in relation to statutory work, emerged from their responses at the end of training to questions about the sort of work

for which they felt most and least prepared. Of the nineteen students who were interviewed at this stage only six said they felt reasonably prepared to undertake statutory work. Four of these students attributed their relative confidence in this area of work to their placement experiences, and particularly to the practice teaching approaches they encountered, while two further students attributed their relative confidence to pre-training experiences in area teams. The remaining thirteen students expressed unease at the prospect of undertaking statutory work, and the most common explanations given revolved around their inability to reconcile this type of work with the principles of practice to which they aspired.

As was seen in Chapter Eight, an ability to integrate theoretical ideas, principles of practice and other sources of knowledge was a hallmark of the fluent approach. It seems possible, then, that a lack of attention to the students' experience and to their values and attitudes may have played some part in developing or perpetuating the fragmentation of knowledge depicted in many of their accounts.

On the basis of the discussion so far it might be thought that the students' course had relied solely on lecturing as a teaching approach and that little attempt had been made to address any of those areas about which the students expressed so much concern. As was noted earlier this was not the case. From the students' perspective, however, the attempts made were either less than successful or insufficient to meet their learning needs. Their experiences of some of the different teaching approaches employed will be considered before concluding this chapter.

10.3.4. The students' experiences of other teaching methods and approaches

One of the commonest approaches employed to enable the students to play a more active part in their course was, from their perspective, the least successful. This involved the use of a lecture format followed by discussion of the material presented. Thirteen of the students interviewed at the end of training singled out this approach as one which had failed to help them learn, and their comments revolved around two main issues. In the first place some students felt that this approach had confused lecture with seminar and in doing so diminished what might be achieved by either. As one student put it:

> I'm not saying I like being lectured at, nobody does, but that might have been better than trying to get us to discuss things in the big group. At least you'ld know where you were. To me the course confuses lectures with seminars and I don't think that works. Either you give a lecture and acknowledge that's what you're doing, or you let the students present things and bring our experience in that way. The seminars in social philosophy were more like that, and the special interest group this term was good because it was up to us to present things, but the way most people did it you were expected to latch onto whatever topic it was and that doesn't work.

Although several students echoed this view, the most frequent comments about group discussions concerned the dynamics which operated in the student group. While some students spoke of the difficulty they had in speaking in a large group, and of a sense that when they did speak their contributions were not valued by some of their fellow students, others spoke of the frustration they felt at being one of a few people who were willing to contribute when the majority of students did not. This schism between "talkers" and "non-talkers" was a troubling phenomenon for the students, and it was something they would have welcomed help with from their teachers. From their perspective, however, group dynamics were an area which was scarcely addressed by their teachers, or at least not in a way which might have helped them to explore their own responses to group interactions. This extract provides an illustration of their concerns:

> I think what happened was we all got into roles very early in the course and we couldn't get out of them. We tried to address that ourselves, as a group, because the course doesn't look at that, but it felt very awkward. Even though it was just students there the only people who talked were the ones who talk anyway. We needed some facilitation, someone to help us look at that. There's hardly anything on groups in the course, and what there was, it was all other people. Like this applies to clients but not to us. There was nothing to help us look at ourselves, how we work in a group.

As has been seen, the students experienced considerable difficulties in working with groups, particularly family groups, which were associated with their own responses to group interactions. In these circumstances the provision of opportunities to explore their responses during their education and training might have made a helpful contribution to the development of their practice. As far as the teaching approaches which were employed are concerned, it is perhaps unsurprising, given their concerns about large group discussions, that the students much preferred a second approach which was also commonly used to supplement a lecture format. This involved dividing into smaller

groups to discuss the information which had been presented. Several students again felt, however, that the absence of facilitation had limited what could be achieved. When this approach was combined with role play or exercises in twos and threes it was appreciated more.

One aspect of academic teaching on the students' course which it might be thought would have gone some way towards addressing the concerns they identified was the provision throughout their education and training of tutorial teaching. Although there seems to an assumption that this form of teaching constitutes an important aspect of social work education and training little attention appears to have been paid to it in the literature of the field. Stone (1982, p. 49), for example, alludes to the tutor as "an influential figure" in students' lives, but does not elaborate further. Contrary to this kind of assumption, tutorial teaching does not emerge from the accounts of the students who took part in this research as a particularly significant aspect of their education and training. Only two students in fact mentioned their tutor as having contributed to the development of their practice. In one case a tutor had a particular interest in the type of work being undertaken by a student and had been able to offer support and suggestions for reading which had been of direct assistance. In the second case a tutor had been involved in helping to resolve problems which had arisen in the course of a placement, and this was described by the student concerned as having a direct influence on the development of his practice.

For the most part, however, tutorial teaching was not mentioned by the students except in response to direct questioning. From these responses it emerges that some students found tutorials problematic because from their perspective their tutor's approach had not enabled them to address their learning needs. While opinions about individual teaching approaches are perhaps particularly open to personal bias, there was a considerable degree of consensus amongst students who shared the same tutor about the extent to which his or her approach had been helpful. Moreover, it will be seen in the following chapter that the kind of approaches to tutorial teaching which the students found unhelpful were very similar to approaches to practice teaching which they found less than helpful. This suggests that some approaches to individual teaching were generally found more helpful than others.

Three approaches to tutorial teaching were perceived to be less than helpful by

the students. These included an approach which had involved the establishment of a relationship which they found difficult to distinguish from a therapeutic relationship. Although they appreciated the warmth of this approach they felt that it was insufficiently challenging. A similar opinion was expressed by other students who found their tutor warm and approachable, but who felt that tutorials had remained at the level of general conversation. In contrast with these warm but unchallenging approaches the third approach which the students found less than helpful was an approach which they described as rather distant and overly intellectual. The students who encountered this approach indicated that they had felt rather intimidated by it, and had therefore been reluctant to discuss any problems they were experiencing during tutorials. Unsurprisingly, given these perceptions of unhelpful approaches, the kind of approach which was unanimously considered helpful by those students who encountered it was one which was perceived to combine warmth and a personal interest in the students as individuals with a more challenging approach to identifying both strengths and learning needs.

Even in those cases where a tutor's approach was perceived to have been helpful, however, this seems to have had little direct influence on the development of the students' practice. It was not the case, for example, that those students who perceived their tutor's approach to be helpful were predominantly those who developed a fluent approach to practice. Nor did these students refer to tutorials in the course of their accounts as a significant aspect of their education and training. The reason seems likely to lie at least in part in the fact that from the students' perspective tutorials had taken place too infrequently to have very much significance. The lack of time available for tutorials was commented on by all the students who took part in the research in response to direct questioning about this aspect of their education and training, and from their perspective this had limited their usefulness. This student's comment was not untypical:

> When I came on the course I'd expected there would be a lot more attention to you as an individual. I don't know why, I just assumed that's what a social work course would be like. I know tutorials are supposed to do that, but they don't happen very often. I actually had more tutorials when I was an undergraduate. My tutor was very good, and I got a lot out of the tutorials I had, but in the end of the day I'm not sure it made a lot of difference. There's only so much you can do in two or three at the most tutorials a term.

One corollary of the lack of time available for tutorial teaching which was mentioned by several students concerned the practice based written work on which most of the research interviews were based. From the students' perspective, although attention was paid in tutorials to how they might approach this work, the attention paid to the end result was limited to written comments. While some students would have appreciated discussion of the practice issues raised in these comments, others would have welcomed assistance in developing the skills involved in analysing and structuring the material they had presented. This student, for example, was aware of some problems in this respect:

> I feel that I tend to write in a very prosaic way. Everything is a story. I felt when I was trying to write that work that I was in danger of producing *my* stream of conciousness about the work, rather than step back and look at it and say what was important for me or others was x, y, z. The thing is that to stand back from it and say what is important you've got to know what is important to your assessor so you can structure your work in a way that makes sense to them and to you.

Given the difficulties experienced in analysing and organising information not only by this student, but also by many of the other students who took part in the research, more attention to the form as well as to the content of their written work might have contributed not only to the quality of their academic work, but also to the development of their practice.

In contrast with the teaching approaches so far discussed, two further approaches were identified by all the students who took part in the research as having made a significant contribution to the development of their practice. The first of these was the inclusion of contributions from practitioners to supplement information presented by lecturers. This approach appears to have gone some way towards meeting a need identified by many students for role models who could demonstrate how particular theories and techniques might be used in practice. An indication of the potency of such role models is provided by the fact that practitioners' contributions were frequently mentioned by the students as having been a source of inspiration and information in undertaking the work they described. Even towards the end of their education and training, for example, some students referred back to a session during the first year of their course in which a group of practitioners had demonstrated how they speculated about the meaning of the information available when working with families. As this extract indicates, this had been a lasting source

of learning:

> It's a long time ago now, but whenever I'm stuck like that I think back to this session we had in the first year where these practitioners came in and showed us how they worked. ... It was the idea that you *could* speculate, that you didn't have to have all the answers. I use that a lot. It's better if you can do it with someone else, but even on my own I can use that to free my mind up a bit: ok, this doesn't seem to be working, let's sit down and throw some ideas around.

The only complaint the students had about this kind of input was that there was not enough of it, and this was also their only complaint about a teaching approach which was unanimously agreed to have been the most helpful. This was the use, during the second term of their course, of video taped role play, which the students referred to as "the skills class". In the students' opinion this class was the only aspect of academic teaching on their course other than contributions from practitioners which had helped them to address the question which was of greatest concern to them, namely how they might make use of course content in practice. They particularly appreciated the fact that this work was undertaken in small groups, where as one student put it "you could make a fool of yourself without feeling stupid." They also very much appreciated the opportunity to observe and reflect on their practice with the help of criticism and suggestions from their teachers and fellow students. In several cases work undertaken in a skills class was identified by the students as having enabled them to overcome some of the problems associated with the fragmented approach. This student's description of the impact of a skills class on his work provides an illustration:

> It was the skills class that helped me there. What happened was, the tutor asked if anyone had anything they wanted to work on. I thought it's now or never, so I said I was having a lot of problems with this case. So then we role played that meeting. The first time I played myself, the social worker, and then we did it again exactly the same, only this time I played the son and someone else played the social worker. It was incredible. I suddenly realised how he must have felt with me and his mother both getting on at him like that. Then people made suggestions how I could handle it differently and we tried some of those until I felt comfortable with it. That was a breakthrough for me, that class.

As far as the students were concerned this kind of approach met their learning needs exactly and without exception they felt that they would have benefitted greatly had it been extended throughout the two years of their course. As one

student put it:

> You can learn more in one twenty minute role play than in twenty months of lectures.

Or as another student put it:

> The skills class was brilliant. It was the only part of the course that looked at you yourself, and after all that's all you've got.

Overall, the impression conveyed by the students' accounts of their experiences of academic teaching is that although this aspect of their education and training had made a significant contribution in enabling them to move beyond the everyday social approach, it had been of limited assistance in enabling them to resolve the problems associated with the fragmented approach. Paradoxically, by emphasising the coverage of course content at the expense of attention to the teaching approaches employed, limitations may have been imposed on the extent to which the students were able to make use of course content in practice. As a corollary, the development of the students' practice beyond the fragmented approach appears to have depended largely on their placement experiences. Before going on to examine the part played by these experiences in the development of their practice the main themes which have been discussed in this chapter will be summarised.

Summary

In this chapter what information is provided by the students' accounts about the influence of academic teaching on the development of their practice has been considered. It has been seen that from the students' perspective emphasis had been placed on traditional approaches to teaching at the expense of sufficient attention either to their own experiences, ideas and values, or to the question of how they might make use of course content in practice. As a result, although academic teaching was of considerable assistance in enabling the students to move beyond the everyday social approach to practice, it may have been of limited assistance in enabling them to resolve the problems associated with the fragmented approach. The volume of information presented and the way in which that information was organised may in fact have contributed to the development or persistence of some of those problems. In addition, the students' accounts suggest that an emphasis on the lecture as a vehicle for presenting information limited the opportunities available to them

for achieving the integration of different sources of knowledge and developing the interpersonal skills which were the hallmark of the fluent approach. Although their teachers had attempted to provide such opportunities by employing a range of other teaching approaches, from the students' perspective these approaches were either less than successful or insufficient to meet their learning needs.

Chapter 11
THE INFLUENCE OF THE STUDENTS' PLACEMENT EXPERIENCES

Introduction

As was noted in the introduction to the thesis, the research described here was carried out against a background of rapid change in the field of social work education, including moves towards the accreditation of practice teachers and the approval of placement agencies. Alongside these developments an increasing amount of attention has been paid in the literature of social work education to the quality of practice teaching in particular. The accounts of the students who took part in this research suggest that this attention is not misplaced. Amongst the different educational experiences discussed in the course of the research interviews, the teaching approaches they encountered while on placement appear to have had the greatest influence on the development of their practice. In some cases, however, factors associated with the students' placement agencies also appear to have played a significant part. The aim of this chapter is to describe these placement experiences and to draw out the implications for the development of the students' practice.

The kind of practice teaching approaches which appear to have been both helpful and unhelpful in relation to the development of the students' practice bear some considerable resemblance to the findings of a number of previous studies which have sought to obtain students' views about practice teaching. The relevant findings will therefore be outlined in the first section of this chapter. In the second section the different approaches encountered by the students who took part in this research will then be examined. The third and final section will focus on the part played by factors associated with their placement agencies.

11.1. Students' Perspectives on Practice Teaching

As was seen in the previous chapter, surveys of social workers' perceptions of their education and training have found that more satisfaction is expressed in

relation to placement experiences than in relation to academic teaching. This does not mean, however, that the social workers questioned have expressed unanimous satisfaction with their placement experiences. Rather, although Stevenson and Parsloe (DHSS, 1978) found that 76% of their respondents described their placements as adequate, 24% said their placements had been inadequate. Equally, Davies (1984) reports that when given the opportunity to suggest improvements in social work training 10% of his respondents highlighted the need for more or better placements. As with their respondents' comments on academic teaching, the survey methods employed by these researchers are unable to provide information either about what was meant by terms such as "adequate", "inadequate" or "better", or about why some social workers express dissatisfaction with their placements. Four studies which have explored the perceptions of social work students in more detail suggest, however, that unhelpful practice teaching approaches are likely to have played some part. The main findings of these studies will be outlined here before going on to examine the information obtained in the course of this research.

A study undertaken in the United States by Rosenblatt and Mayer (1975) appears to have been the first to examine social work students' perceptions of practice teaching. The researchers obtained accounts from 233 students of practice situations which they had found particularly stressful. An analysis of fifty of these accounts revealed that the stressful situations described by the students concerned had involved experiences of four practice teaching approaches which they found objectionable. Predominant amongst these approaches was a "therapeutic" approach within which problems encountered in practice were attributed to deficiencies in a student's personality, and attempts made to address those deficiencies by exploring them in supervision. While this approach raised the most strenuous objections, three further approaches were also considered objectionable. These included a "constrictive" approach involving the the curtailment of the students' autonomy, for example by teachers who imposed their own theoretical perspective on their students' work; an "unsupportive" approach, characterised by aloofness, coldness and even hostility on the part of the practice teacher; and an "amorphous" approach within which too little direction was provided by the teacher. Because their focus was on stressful situations, Rosenblatt and Mayer are unable to provide very much information about practice teaching approaches which were perceived to be helpful. They do note, however, that a warm, supportive approach had enabled some students to cope with other stressful experiences

during their placement.

There would appear to be some overlap between the findings of three studies undertaken in Britain and those reported by Rosenblatt and Mayer. Michael (1976) explored practice teaching content and method through the medium of a multi-faceted research strategy involving participant observation, semi-structured interviews and written questionnaires. On the basis of a comparison between the material generated by interviews with thirty practice teachers and students' descriptions of "good" and "bad" supervision, Michael delineated two approaches to practice teaching which were informed by the teachers' own models of social work practice and which students found unhelpful. These she describes as an "apprenticeship/administrative and technical" approach, which placed emphasis on the acquisition of administrative and technical skills, and an "apprenticeship/growth" approach where the focus was on students' emotional growth and self awareness. Like Rosenblatt and Mayer's respondents, then, the students questioned by Michael found practice teaching approaches based on their teachers' own model of practice unhelpful. Equally, a focus on their personal development was unwelcome. Michael was also able, however, to provide information about a third approach which students did find helpful. She describes this approach as an "educational contract" approach. In the context of this approach, she suggests, the aims of a placement were governed not by a practice teacher's own model of practice, but by the educational needs of their students.

A further study of practice teaching is reported by Syson and Baginsky (1981). Using a semi-structured schedule the authors interviewed practice teachers, students and tutors who had been involved in forty one placements with the aim of providing a profile of practice placements in Great Britain. Perhaps because obtaining students' perspectives on practice teaching constituted only one aspect of this broad aim, Syson and Baginsky were unable to identify particular practice teaching styles. They do, however, present a number of comments made by students which again have some consonance with the findings reported by Rosenblatt and Mayer. One student, for example, complained of supervision sessions which were no more than weekly reporting sessions, suggesting an amorphous approach. Other students felt that their practice teachers had been impersonal and overly professional, suggesting an unsupportive approach. In addition, although almost all this sample of practice teachers thought a therapeutic approach unacceptable, one student thought

their teacher had attempted to employ a psychoanalytical approach, while another complained of too great an emphasis on the discussion of feelings. Amongst other students, however, opportunities to discuss feelings were welcomed. Syson and Baginsky conclude that there may have been some confusion about what kind of feelings could be discussed in supervision.

Both the unacceptibility of a therapeutic approach amongst the practice teachers interviewed by Syson and Baginsky, and their confusion about the kind of feelings which might be discussed in supervision, would appear to reflect a more general move within the field of social work not only away from ways of working based on psychotherapeutic methods, but also away from what Curnock (1985, p.78) describes as "social working" students. Certainly a tendency amongst practice teachers to approach their teaching as they approach their practice has been the focus of criticism. Gardiner (1987), for example, describes this tendancy as an inappropriate "concept leakage" from practice to teaching. However, the view that practice skills are entirely inappropriate in practice teaching is challenged by a recent small scale study undertaken by Brodie (1990).

Brodie's study was based on an analysis of tape recordings of eighteen supervision sessions involving six practice teachers and six students which were supplemented by interviews with both parties. Although his focus was primarily on the content of practice teaching, and particularly on the extent to which teachers make explicit reference to theoretical ideas, Brodie found that the use of certain skills commonly associated with practice, such as encouraging exploration, summarising and clarifying, was appreciated by students. He also identified an approach employed by two teachers which their students found unhelpful and which he terms a "caseload management" approach. Like the "reporting sessions" complained of by one student to Syson and Baginsky, this approach would appear to bear some resemblance to the amorphous approach described by Rosenblatt and Mayer.

None of the studies described here were designed to explore the relationship between students' perceptions of practice teaching approaches and the development of their practice. The experiences of the students who took part in this research suggest, however, that there may be a close relationship between the two. Of the nineteen students who were interviewed towards the end of their final placement fourteen students had encountered approaches to practice

teaching during one or more of their placements which have so close a resemblance to the objectionable approaches described by Rosenblatt and Mayer that it seems unnecessary to develop a new terminology to describe them. By the end of training only one of these students had developed a fluent approach to practice, suggesting that these approaches were unhelpful in relation to the development of their practice. Further support for this conclusion derives from the fact that the other five students who had developed a fluent approach had all encountered an approach to practice teaching which appears to have been helpful during each of their three placements. In some cases, as was noted earlier, the development of the students' practice also appears to have been influenced by factors associated with their placement agencies. In particular, the one student who had been able to develop a fluent approach despite the unhelpful teaching approaches she encountered attributed the development of her practice to her second and third placement agencies. The relationship between these different placement experiences and the development of the students' practice will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

11.2. The Students' Experiences of Practice Teaching

In order to examine the part played in the development of the students' practice by the practice teaching approaches they encountered the four approaches which appear to have been unhelpful to them will be described here first. The implications for the development of the students' practice will then be examined with reference to the accounts of the thirteen students who had been unable to develop a fluent approach by the end of training. Having discussed these unhelpful approaches and their implications, the relationship between the kind of approach which appears to have been more helpful and the development of a fluent approach to practice will be considered. Before going on to describe the four approaches which appear to have been unhelpful to the students two points require some clarification.

Firstly, the students' accounts suggest that in some cases their own approach to supervision may have played a part in generating an unhelpful practice teaching approach. As was seen in Chapter Nine, some of the older, more experienced students who took part in the research tended not to reveal their learning needs in supervision because they found it difficult to adjust to their

role as learners. The kind of practice teaching approaches they encountered will be described in the course of the following discussion. In addition, however, two further students themselves suggested that their own approach to supervision may have played a part in the unhelpful teaching approaches they encountered. This suggestion is supported by the fact that other students who took part in the research had previously experienced a more helpful approach on the part of the same practice teachers. It may be the case, then, that to some extent at least the kind of practice teaching approaches encountered by the students were a function of the unique interaction between themselves and their teachers. On the other hand, in nine further cases where students had been placed with the same practice teachers there was some considerable coincidence in the extent to which the approaches employed by these teachers appear to have been helpful to them.

Secondly, it should be made clear that the approaches which will be examined in the following section of this chapter have been described as unhelpful not because the students themselves necessarily found them objectionable, although in some cases they did, but because they appear to have imposed constraints on the development of their practice. It should also be noted that the four approaches were not necessarily mutually exclusive. The implications of some of the combinations encountered by the students will be considered shortly. For the time being, however, they will be separated out and described as four distinct approaches.

11.2.1. Unhelpful approaches to practice teaching

Amongst the students who took part in this research two students encountered an approach to practice which was not dissimilar to the therapeutic approach described by Rosenblatt and Mayer, in that the difficulties they encountered in practice were attributed by their teachers to deficiencies in their personal development. This extract from the account of one of these students provides an illustration:

> By that stage supervision had completely broken down, so it wasn't all that much help at all. ... Basically, about half way through he gave me some critical feedback. I thought it was very badly handled. He sort of said things like most people who come into social work are damaged people and they have to learn to deal with their damagedness, and I don't think think you've learnt to do that yet. Then he said well you're going to have to work

> hard to pass this placement, and I thought is he saying I'm a damaged person, I've got a few weeks to sort my whole life out and I don't even know what's supposed to be wrong with me. I reacted very badly to that.

A third student had also encountered a therapeutic approach while on placement in the United States. In this case, however, the approach had consisted in a more general focus on her personal development rather than in the attribution of specific problems to particular personality defects.

A second unhelpful approach to practice teaching encountered by some students was very similar to the approach described by Rosenblatt and Mayer as an unsupportive aproach, in that the students concerned found their practice teacher unhelpfully cold and aloof. For example:

> I found the sessions very difficult because of the way she was. She was a very serious, intense person. She came accross as quite cold and detached like she wasn't putting a lot of herself into it. I can see that a lot of things I was doing then weren't right, but I felt the way she brought things up was very cold. It felt more like personal hostilty rather than what can you learn from it.

While both the therapeutic approach and the unsupportive approach were only rarely encountered by the students who took part in this research, an approach to practice teaching which was not dissimilar to the constrictive approach described by Rosenblatt and Mayer was more common. In some cases the students' teachers had attempted to impose their own theoretical perspective on their students' work. For example:

> She had such a definite viewpoint, the psychoanalytical viewpoint, which I don't have the experience or knowledge to criticise, but it was the *terms* that stuck in my throat, having that imposed on my own particular work. ... She was very interested, for instance, in his mother's early life experiences and in his own earliest experiences, whereas I didn't think it was appropriate to be exploring those things at that stage. There was just too much other stuff going on. Also I didn't feel particularly comfortable with doing it at that stage.

In one case the intention of a practice teacher whose approach was perceived to be constrictive appears to have been to protect her student from undue stress at the beginning of a placement. In effect, however, she undermined his confidence by accompanying him on his first visit to his client and taking the leading role, leaving him feeling frustrated and unclear about his own role. In contrast another student described her middle placement as "spectacularly

unsuccessful" because her practice teacher had allowed her to undertake very little work on the grounds that she might harm the people concerned.

While these variations on the constrictive approach are all documented by Rosenblatt and Mayer, an additional variation was described by some of the students who took part in this research. This involved the imposition of their practice teachers' own beliefs or ideology. In one case, for example, a student explained that her practice teacher was of little help because "she was a born again Christian and that was imposed on everything". Equally one student who had undertaken a community work placement felt that his practice teacher had attempted to impose her own ideology:

> Between me and her it was like when two people are looking at things differently and neither person is prepared to hear the other. I felt I'd been labelled "typical social worker". I know the way I reacted wasn't very helpful but she made me feel like everything I'd done before was worthless.

In other cases practice teachers had attempted to provide answers for the problems encountered by the students in practice and this too had been experienced as constrictive. For example:

> I suppose my concern is that I don't particularly, I find the idea of the social worker just assuming that authority difficult. I talked it over with my supervisor and she was a lot more down to earth. I think she felt really I was being oversensitive: " Don't worry, it will be alright when you get there. At this stage you're acting as much on behalf of the Reporter as anything else so you've got that authority, but also you're concerned and interested". I suppose that was *some* help, but I'm not sure how much. It didn't really get to the heart of the matter as I saw it.

The most common approach to practice teaching described by the students who took part in this research corresponds closely to the approach described by Rosenblatt and Mayer as an amorphous approach, in that it had lacked focus and direction. Of the forty placements about which detailed information was obtained this approach was encountered in sixteen cases. In some cases the approach again seems to have been associated with an intention on the part of a practice teacher to protect their student at the beginning of a placement. In response to their questions about what was expected of them, for example, two students reported that their teacher had told them: "Just practise talking to someone to begin with", and "Just get acquainted and tell me what you think".

This lack of clarity in the early stages of a placement was commonly associated with two more persistent approaches to practice teaching which lacked focus and direction. In the context of one approach supervision sessions appear to have consisted in detailed discussion of the students' cases in which possible explanations for the situations they encountered were "thrown about" by both student and teacher or "batted off" their teachers by the students.

The second approach has some consonance with the approach described by Brodie (1990) as "caseload management". In the context of this approach supervision sessions appear to have involved the students in giving a summary of their work and an outline of their plans, which were then approved by their teacher with no further exploration. In some cases the practice teachers who employed this approach seem to have taken it for granted that this approach was what was required, a rather extreme example being provided by a student who had eventually questioned his teacher's approach:

> It was like chalk and cheese what I thought her job was and what she thought it was. I thought she should have been teaching me, but she said that was the university's job. She was just there to provide work experience and monitor what I was doing.

In other cases, however, the approach appears to have been generated by both student and teacher. It was this kind of approach, for example, which was most commonly encountered during their first placement by the older, more experienced students who took part in the research. In addition the approach was in some cases negotiated between student and teacher at the beginning of a final placement, on the grounds that at this stage a more "consultative" approach was appropriate. Very typical of this approach was an approach to the students' written work which also involved monitoring rather than teaching. This student's response to a question about her written work provides an illustration:

> I didn't find the case notes much help at all. In fact that's something I would have liked more help with. My supervisor was very keen on me handing them into her every week, which was a bit of a chore, but as far as I know she never read them. I think it was more just to check I was doing them.

In the course of the following discussion the implications for the development of the students' practice of these unhelpful approaches to practice teaching will be examined.

11.2.2. The implications for the development of the students' practice

In order to examine the implications for the development of the students' practice of the practice teaching approaches described above this discussion will focus on the experiences of some of the thirteen students who had encountered one or more of these approaches at some stage in training and who had not developed a fluent approach by the end of training. The experiences of three of these students are of particular interest because the work they described at the end of training was very typical of the fragmented approach. That these students had been unable to resolve any of the problems associated with this approach seems likely to have been related to the practice teaching approaches they encountered, since all three students had encountered only unhelpful approaches.

During her first placement one student, who was amongst the older, more experienced students who took part in the research, had encountered an amorphous approach which she attributed partly to her own problems in adapting to the role of a student. This had been followed during her middle placement in the United States by a therapeutic approach and, during her final placement, by another amorphous approach, negotiated on this occasion between teacher and student. Her own description of these approaches illustrates the implications for the development of her practice:

> I think in the first placement it was me not recognising my learning needs, but that was balanced by the fact that my supervisor was the only social worker in the hospital and I felt I needed to take on my share of the caseload. ... In the States I worked very independently. Supervision was more reflective and more personal. We were looking more at my feelings. That was interesting but there again it wasn't really focussed on the work. Now it seems to be the other way round, that there's an expectation I would get on and do the job and not look at my learning needs. ... It was my supervisor's idea. She thought because it's the final placement a consultative approach was appropriate, though I think there was probably some denial myself about what my learning needs were. I think I was flattered at first. Looking back on it though I think I needed to reflect back a lot more on what I was doing instead of this jumping about from one idea to another. In supervision it was more a matter of what had I done, what were my plans, fine. I mean I'm sure she would have told me if she disagreed, but I got the impression that all I had to do to qualify was stay six months and assimilate things.

While this student had attempted to deploy theory as recipes for practice during both her first and final placements, the other two students had deployed theory only with hindsight. During his first placement one of these students had encountered an amorphous approach which again seems to have been related in part to his own concern, as an older, more experienced student, to present a confident, capable front. This approach was followed by two further amorphous approaches. Towards the end of training this student identified a lack of focus on the problems involved in discussing difficult issues as a negative feature of both his first and second placements. Although he described his third practice teacher's approach as interesting and helpful, his account suggests that that it had consisted in a rather unfocussed discussion of ideas and sharing of feelings which had not enabled him to address the problems he was experiencing in raising issues he thought relevant with his client:

> I think what's been helpful in this placement is that my supervisor has always encouraged me to speculate about why people are in the sitution they're in, why this woman has a poor relationship with her family, what her behaviour is communicating to the family, to the world. ... Probably the most helpful thing was being able to share some of the emotional difficulties you find you run into in terms of work with clients and feeling that your supervisor is saying this is alright, this is how I feel too.

Like these students, the third student had encountered an amorphous approach during her first placement. In this case, although ideas had been "thrown around" between teacher and student, the student's increasingly angry feelings towards her client had not been addressed and she had eventually withdrawn from her attempt to help. During her middle placement, she had encountered an extremely constrictive approach intended to protect the people with whom she was supposed to be working. Partly in response to the deskilling effects of this placement, in the student's view anyway, her third practice teacher had adopted a caseload management approach. Although the student had initially appreciated this approach, her overall assessment suggests that it was not helpful for the development of her practice:

> I think I was getting dragged along, not stopping to look at what was going on. I think perhaps, going back to supervision, I think if I'd been challenged a bit more that would have helped. I think partly because it is a final placement, and also because of the middle placement, because I'd written in my report that I needed more freedom than I'd had, I'd been left to get on with my own work. It's not as unsupportive as that sounds, but

> supervision has become very much work load management rather than supervision.

The remaining nine students who had not developed a fluent approach by the end of training been more able than the three students whose experiences have been discussed so far to resolve some of the problems which were the hallmark of the fragmented approach. Their accounts suggest that this was associated to some extent at least with the fact that they had encountered a helpful approach to practice teaching during one, and in some cases two, of their placements. Equally, they had also encountered less helpful approaches during at least one placement. The variety of experiences described by these students preclude any detailed discussion of all nine case. Three cases will, however, be singled out for more detailed discussion because in these cases the students had encountered particularly unhelpful approaches to practice teaching during their first placement. In one case the student concerned had encountered an approach which he experienced as both constrictive and therapeutic. On the one hand he felt his practice teacher had attempted to impose her own psychoanalytic perspective on his work. On the other hand she appeared to attribute his failure to approach his work as she suggested to personality deficiencies. In his words: "She put me on the dissecting plate too." As this extract from his account indicates, his response had been to conceal his feelings in supervision, along with the difficulties he was experiencing in practice:

> The thing that riled me was that she was also implying that I was emotionally split off myself, which - I mean I think there are probably some degree of splits in each of us, but there was some suggestion that I wasn't aware of some of my emotions. At points I got dangerously angry in supervision and I had to address that after a while, with myself. I changed my attitude to supervision after about six weeks and decided to be very much less open, because she implied that this "split" was a worry for her about my practice.

During his first placement this student had struggled to make sense of the situation in which he was working in his own terms, and his approach had been fairly typical of the hindsight deployment of theory. In contrast a second student had attempted to deploy theory as recipes for practice. This extract from her account suggests that the rigidity of her approach was at least in part a reflection of the unsupportive approach of her practice teacher:

> My supervisor was very formal. I didn't know anything about

> herself, and supervision was very formal, very impersonal. ... It was very unhelpful. If you're accepted as a person then you can be yourself at work, whereas I took the social worker to work and left myself at home.

Although both these students encountered more helpful practice teaching approaches during their second and third placements neither student was entirely able to overcome the problems they experienced during their first placement. It may be the case, of course, that they would not have developed a fluent approach even if their first practice teachers' approaches had been more helpful. Towards the end of training, however, the student who had encountered an unsupportive approach indicated that in her case at least the unhelpful approach she had encountered had contributed to her continuing difficulties:

> I don't think I was so cautious before. I mean in some ways that's good, but you need to be spontaneous sometimes, and that's what I've lost. ... I think the first placement had a lot to do with it. It was very much a process of withdrawal of me personally. The thing I keep saying is what happened to the person I used to be, which I know is part of the professionalisation process, but what happened to all the good and useful bits I used to have before?

Of the four unhelpful approaches to practice teaching described by the students the therapeutic and unsupportive approaches seem to have been the most unhelpful as far as the development of their practice was concerned. All the students who encountered these approaches indicated that their response had been to withhold information in supervision about the problems they experienced in practice, and to present a confident front. The disabling effects of these two approaches are most apparent, however, in the experiences of the one student who was just beginning to move away from the everyday social approach by the end of training. Prior to training this student had identified some concerns which it was her aim to address through training:

> Basically, it was just that I found working in the mental health field fascinating, and I could be very good at it, but it could be dangerous for me because I identified too much with people and got very drawn in. That's why I came on the course. I thought through training I'll learn the boundaries.

During her first placement, however, this student encountered an approach to practice teaching which she found cold and discouraging. Unsurprisingly under

these circumstances, she had been reluctant to reveal her concerns but had eventually done so when problems similar to those she had experienced prior to training began to emerge. In response her practice teacher had combined his unsupportive approach with a therapeutic approach by attributing the problems she described to a damaged personality. In the earlier stages of her work this student's approach had been very typical of the everyday social approach. After this supervision session, however, her account depicts one of the most extreme examples of the deployment of theory as recipes for practice obtained in the course of the research. This extract from her account suggests that her practice teacher's approach had played a part in this development:

> After that I decided to work on my own as much as I could. I started making myself present what I'd done in a positive light rather than telling him the problems I was having. At the same time though I was going through a bit of a crisis. I kept asking myself should I be on this course? Am I a social worker? Should I just pack my bags and leave? I came to the conclusion that what I'd do, I'd give it a damned good try and see what happened. So I sort of became a lot more determined, not just not to take any shit off people, but that if I was going to go and see people, then I was going to be listened to.

During her middle placement the student had encountered an amorphous approach which had enabled her to retreat from this position, back towards an everyday social approach:

> The middle placement was an easy placement really. It wasn't very challenging, but it gave me a chance to lick my wounds and get back to being myself again.

Consequently, the work she described at the end of her final placement had, to begin with, again been very typical of the everyday social approach. In the course of this work, however, she again began to experience problems similar to those she had experienced prior to training. Although she was very reluctant to raise her concerns in supervision her experience of her practice teacher eventually encouraged her do so:

> I was very wary of telling anyone about it because of what happened before on the first placement. It was really important to me to get through this placement without anyone knowing. But in the end I thought well, he works with people with learning difficulties and he treats them like anyone else, so maybe he'll do the same for me.

At this stage the concerns she had identified prior to training began to be addressed, but as she herself concluded:

> It's frightening to think I could have got a different placement and got through the course without ever having addressed some of those things.

Again, it is not possible to know whether this student would have been able to develop a fluent approach to practice by the end of training had she encountered a helpful approach to practice teaching earlier. Further evidence to support the view that the practice teaching approaches encountered by the students played a significant part in the development of their practice emerges, however, from the accounts of those students who were able to develop a fluent approach by the end of training. As was noted earlier, five of these six students had encountered a helpful approach to practice teaching during each of their three placements. The kind of approach they found helpful will be described here next. As this approach is described its connection with the skills which were the hallmark of the fluent approach will probably become apparent. Having described the approach, however, a further illustration of the connection will be provided by drawing on the accounts of two of the students concerned who had experienced problems at the beginning of their final placement which had been resolved by a change of practice teacher.

11.2.3. A Helpful approach to practice teaching

Like the approach described by Michael (1976) as an "educational contract" approach, the kind of approach to practice teaching which appears to have been helpful in relaion to the development of the students' practice was an approach within which emphasis was placed on identifying and addressing their learning needs. Unsurpringly perhaps, this approach was also in many respects the antithesis of the four approaches described earlier. In contrast with the unsupportive approach, for example, those students who encountered this approach felt their practice teachers had been warm and reassuring, and had had a genuine interest in them. In turn, the students had felt able to discuss any anxieties they had about their placements or about the work they were allocated. This student, for example, described how her practice teacher's approach had helped allay some of her anxieties about undertaking statutory work:

> I think it was the fact that my supervisor, I liked her straight away. She came accross as a very natural, friendly sort of person. So I felt comfortable saying it to her, you know, I

> haven't done this kind of work before. Well she knew that, obviously, but being able to discuss with her how nervous I felt about it, that really helped.

In contrast with the therapeutic or constrictive approaches, these practice teachers neither attributed their students' concerns to personal deficiencies, nor attempted to provide answers based on their own approach to practice. Instead they reassured the students that their anxiety was a natural reaction and that the purpose of their placement was to learn rather than to immediately demonstrate fully fledged competency. To the students this emphasis on learning usually came as a great relief, because from their perspective the need to demonstrate competence in the context of an assessed placement had loomed very large. Had their practice teachers only focussed on their role as learners, however, the students might have been left feeling deskilled. Instead, their teachers were concerned to help them identify strengths and skills they brought to their placement which might be of assistance to them, as well as areas they might address in the course of the placement. For example:

> I'd had a look at the assessment format they use and I'd thought, oh, this is going to be a lot about child development and childlessness, I hardly know anything about those things. And then having thought that I went back to my supervisor and she helped me put it into perspective. "What similarities does this have with work you've done before, what do you think you might be drawing on?" That was very helpful. I think because it was a specialist agency I'd assumed I couldn't possibly know anything, but once we'd discussed it in those terms I was able to see that I actually knew quite a lot that was relevant. So then it was a question of what else might it be useful to look at.

Having identified strengths and skills on which the students could draw as well as areas they might need to address, the focus of this approach to practice teaching was on the particular pieces of work the students undertook during their placement. In the early stages of their work the students particularly appreciated their practice teachers' help in planning their approach. In contrast with the constrictive approach, however, their teachers did not impose their own ideas on the students' work. Instead, they encouraged them to draw both on their own experience, and on the theoretical frameworks of which they were aware in order to identify potentially relevant lines of inquiry. Equally, the students' ideas were not simply "thrown around" or accepted without further exploration as they were in the context of an amorphous approach. Rather their teachers challenged them to explain why they thought a particular area might repay exploration, how they had derived their ideas from the information

available and how they might explore their ideas with the people concerned. They also encouraged them to extend their thinking by offering ideas of their own, and in some cases by offering relevant books or articles which were particularly appreciated. This student's description of her practice teacher's approach provides an illustration:

> What I really appreciated about her approach was her openness to ideas. She wasn't taking one line - this is how it should be done - it was more a case of challenging discussion: "What do *you* think, why do you think that, how might you act on that." She'd listen and then pick up on things rather than saying this is how it's done.

This focus in the early stages of the students' work on enabling them to discuss their concerns, on encouraging them to identify their skills and strengths, and on challenging them to formulate and justify their own ideas was both a prelude to and a pattern for the way in which the students' work was discussed as it progressed. Throughout their involvement in the work they described those students who encountered this approach felt able to discuss the problems they encountered with their practice teacher without fear of personal criticism and in the knowledge that their concerns would be taken seriously. Most commonly, as has been seen, the problems encountered by the students revolved around the management of their interactions with the people with whom they worked, and around the legitimacy of engaging in particular activities. When they raised problems of this sort, their practice teachers did not attempt to provide ready made answers. Instead they encouraged the students to reflect on why they found a particular situation difficult and to explore different ways in which they might overcome the difficulties they were experiencing. This student, for example, described how her practice teacher had helped her overcome the problems she had experienced in raising a difficult issue for discussion:

> I had another case too, it was someone who was in prison and they were coming up for parole, and the offence was murder. I had to discuss with his parents how they felt about him living at home if he was paroled. I was trying my hardest to get it out, you know, to talk about it. There was no way. In the end his mother turned the tv up. That was me finished. I just left - thankyou, goodbye. I was mortified when I got outside the house, but my supervisor was great about it. She said not to worry, it's not a disaster, we'll work on it and you can go back next week. First of all she started off with how am I in other situations, you know when there's something that needs uncovered or whatever. Then it all came out, I would never say

> anthing to anybody, I would let people off rather than speak up. So then we brought it back to this case and we looked at how I might do it. We practised it – "what if this, what if that". So then I went out again, and it worked a treat. It did! They were just fine about it.

In some cases, as has been seen, the problems encountered by the students in relation to the management of their interactions had been associated with their own responses to the people with whom they worked. In these circumstances those students who encountered a helpful approach to practice teaching particularly appreciated their teacher's approach, which they felt had enabled them to discuss their feelings without fear of being criticised or judged. As this student put it:

> In the past I tended to deal with feelings myself, I would keep things to myself. Whereas now I think not being afraid to go and say I got too angry there last night because I was too emotionally involved with the group, and talking about how I was feeling about what was happening in the group and how it had become personal, I think that's something I was needing to learn. That was where I was lucky to have the kind of supervisor I did have. You felt you could say I think I've gone and done this. It was the way she approached these things. She never said yes or no, this or that. She'd look at it, consider it, maybe look at alternatives. I always felt that it was constructive, so then I felt I could say more than I would have in the past.

When the problems encountered by the students in managing their interactions involved concerns about the legitimacy of some of their activities their practice teachers neither offered ready made answers nor treated the students' concerns as a personal problem. Instead, as this extract illustrates, they framed the students' concerns as an opportunity to learn:

> My supervisor was very good there. It wasn't like "you've got a problem with authority" which I've heard some people say has happened to them. It was framed more like "this is an opportunity to look at these things and make up your own mind". ... The way he did that was he suggested maybe I should think of it as trying on a role, that as a student you could do that, that it didn't mean I was throwing all my own values or whatever out of the window. That was a very helpful way of looking at it I thought. It freed me up to look at some of the ways I might handle it, what felt comfortable and what didn't. I think to begin with I was a bit black and white about it if I'm honest.

Alongside this approach to the problems they encountered in managing their interactions the students were continually encouraged both to develop and

articulate their ideas, and to explore how they might make use of those ideas in practice. "Challenging and questioning" was a phrase which constantly recurred in their accounts, and these teaching methods seem to have been the centrepiece of the approach. The approach was also chacterised by the use made of written work as a focus for teaching. While process recordings often provided a focus both for the challenging discussions described by the students, and for the identification of problems relating to the management of interactions, these practice teachers also made use of their students' routine written work in helping them to develop skills in organising information. This student's description of her teacher's approach provides an illustration:

> At first I sat down and panicked. I thought I couldn't write this up in four thousand words never mind a couple of paragraphs. I think I did about three rough drafts then I showed them to my supervisor. She was very good, she was always very constructive with things like that. She never made me feel stupid. She said I seemed to be getting the hang of it, but they were still a bit jumbled. She suggested it might help if I used more headings which I could always take out once I'd got the information organised if they made it too bitty. That worked well. It took me a long time to begin with but I'm beginning to be able to do more of it in my head now. As I come away I'm already beginning to pin things on headings. Even at the time, when I'm with my client, I'm beginning to be able to use the headings to make links between things - that belongs with that, kind of thing. So then I can put that back to her - that rings bells with what you were saying earlier about so and so, sort of thing.

A second student described a different approach to his written work which he found equally useful:

> That's something from my first placement actually. My supervisor showed me this key word system which I use all the time now. ...It's just a way of tagging the main issues and putting things together so you've got a structure for your notes. It helps you think in a more rounded way while you're working too. It stops you getting overwhelmed by all the information.

Evidence to support the view that there was a close connection between the development of a fluent approach to practice and this approach to practice teaching is contained, it is suggested, in the coincidence between the skills associated with fluent practice and those aspects of practice teaching which the students indicated had been helpful to them. In particular, the students' ability to draw on previous experiences of practice, on the theoretical frameworks of which they were aware and on more everyday sources of knowledge in making sense of the situations they described would appear to

have been closely associated with their practice teachers' emphasis on encouraging them to formulate their own ideas and to analyse their feelings. Equally, the development of their interpersonal skills would appear to have been closely associated with the attention paid in supervision to resolving problems relating to the management of their interactions.

Further evidence to support the view that this practice teaching approach had played a significant part in the development of the students' practice can be presented by drawing on the accounts of two students who had been able to develop a fluent approach by the end of their first placement. Both students attributed the development of their skills to their practice teacher's approach. Having again experienced a helpful approach to practice teaching during their middle placement, both students encountered a less helpful approach at the beginning of their final placement. Their accounts indicate that under these circumstances they had been unable to sustain the clarity which had previously characterised their work. In each case, however, a change of practice teacher in the course of their final placement had been associated with a return to their earlier clarity. These extracts from their accounts illustrate their perceptions of the influence of different approaches to practice teaching on the development of their practice:

> I thought at first the placement was going to be a disaster, but that's sorted out now. ... The practice teacher I had at first didn't actually work for the agency, and she didn't really know what the work involved. Supervision was very generalised, whereas I needed to focus more on the nitty gritty. For a while that was very frustrating. I felt I was just muddling along, but then she left and the supervisor I've got now has been brilliant. ... She's more like the other supervisors I've had. She makes you think about what you're actually doing. Apart from that hiccough at the beginning of this placement, I've been very lucky with the supervisors I've had.

> I think to begin with I felt reasonably clear about what I was doing, and for a while I managed to hang onto that, but there was a stage in the work where I was beginning to lose sight of the issues. ... I think that was a lot to do with the supervision I was getting. It wasn't that I didn't raise the issues in supervision, but we just never seemed to get anywhere. He had a lot of work on his own plate and he just left me to my own devices, "you get on with the work", because as far as he was concerned I was getting on ok. But the reason I went there wasn't to practise being a worker, but to use someone to see what the issues were and build frameworks. With this supervisor we're beginning to do that and I feel these skills are coming together now. They were

> there before, but they were beginning to get disorganised and supervision wasn't helping with that. Both my first and middle placements were with what I'd call practice teachers rather than managers. They challenged me and made me think about what I was doing, and that's happening again now with this supervisor.

These accounts suggest, then, that the practice teaching approaches encountered by these students had played a significant part in the development of their practice. As was noted earlier, however, one student who had been able to develop a fluent approach by the end of training had not consistently encountered helpful practice teaching approaches. Her responses to questions about what had been helpful to her during her final placement suggest that in this case the unhelpful practice teaching approaches she encountered had been counterbalanced by some factors associated with her second and third placement agencies. In the final section of this chapter the ways in which factors associated with the students' placement agencies could both constrain and contribute to the development of their practice will be examined.

11.3. The Part Played by The Students' Placement Agencies

As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, recent moves towards the accreditation of practice teachers have been accompanied by similar developments in relation to the approval of placement agencies. In 1989 the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work set out the criteria on which approval was to be based. In comparison with the attention paid to the training and accreditation of practice teachers, however, that paid to the approval of agencies seems somewhat sparse. The criteria for approval consist, for example, only in the following brief statement:

> CCETSW approval of agencies for practice learning will be based on:
>
> an agency policy committment to (a) high standards of practice and (b) provision of high quality learning opportunities within an environment which encourages anti-discriminatory practice.
>
> the existence of good systems for the support and guidance of practice teachers. (CCETSW, 1989a, p.5)

In their contribution to the workshop discussions which preceded moves towards the approval of placement agencies Harrison and Harris (1987) point

out that it is no easy matter to decide either what level of support is required by practice teachers, or what constitutes a sufficiently high quality of practice. The difficulties involved perhaps account for the lack of detail in the Council's regulations. Equally, however, very little research which might provide assistance in this respect has been carried out. Although Michael (1976), Syson and Baginsky (1981) and Brodie (1990) all draw attention to the lack of resources and support available to many practice teachers, which Brodie in particular associates with a "case management" approach to practice teaching, little is known about what other factors may add up to a helpful or unhelpful placement experience.

The information provided by this research is also limited. Because the main focus of the research was on students' approaches to practice and on more specific educational experiences, their experience of the agencies under whose auspices they worked was not systematically explored. Some information does, however, emerge from the students' responses to questions about what had proved helpful or unhelpful to them in undertaking the work they described. These responses suggest that the quality of their placement experiences depended not only on the approaches to practice teaching they encountered, but also on the learning milieux provided by the agencies concerned.

In the literature of educational evaluation the importance of the learning milieu in which students work has been recognised by those writers who have argued for the inclusion of qualitative methods in an evaluative strategy. Parlett and Hamilton (1972 p.11) define a learning milieu as consisting in the social, psychological and material environment in which students and teachers work together. Students, they suggest, do not respond only to preselected course content. Rather, they adapt to the environment in which they are working and pay close attention to "hidden" as well as "visible" content. That this is the case has been demonstrated by researchers in the field of professional education, for example Becker et al. (1977) and Melia (1987), who have documented the ways in which students respond to the different settings in which they find themselves.

Although the information generated by this research about factors which contributed to a helpful or unhelpful learning mileu is limited, what information is available suggests that four factors played some part. These include the contribution made to the students' learning by staff members other than their

practice teachers, the pressure of work in the agencies concerned, the ethos and way things were done within those agencies, and the availability of role models. The students' contrasting experiences of their placement agencies will be considered in relation to each of these factors in turn.

11.3.1. The contribution of other staff members

In response to questions about what had proved helpful or unhelpful to them in undertaking the work they described the students very commonly mentioned the part played by staff members other than their practice teachers. From the perspective of many students the people alongside whom they had worked in their placement agencies had provided information and support which they had greatly appreciated. In some cases this source of information and support had supplemented a helpful practice teaching approach, while in others it had proved something of a lifeline to students who encountered a less helpful approach. One student, for example, described her colleagues as her main source of learning and support:

> I would have to say that any help I've had has been from colleagues. Since the first placement I've had very poor supervision. I mean I can see the need to be professional in supervision. I don't think supervision should be this collusive, pally thing some people get into, but at the same time you need to feel comfortable in supervision, whereas I felt I had to be on the defensive the whole time. So the fact that I had colleagues who were willing to discuss cases and listen to yours has been really important. Apart from the first placement I'd say everything I've learnt has been from colleagues, or just from myself.

In contrast, the people alongside whom another student had worked had compounded her practice teacher's unsupportive approach:

> It wasn't just my practice teacher It was the whole team. From what I've heard it's very unusual for an area team. People do things in a very correct way. They don't even relax when they talk to each other in the coffee room. It seemed very formal, the atmosphere, and the students were somewhere down underneath the plebs. You were generally talked down to and patronised. It was assumed that you had no experience or knowledge to bring to the placement. There were some people who were different, but most people seemed to remove their characters before they came to work. I found it odd, and the other students found it odd. We spent a lot of time avoiding the coffee room because of the awful atmosphere there.

11.3.2. The pressure of work

The students' accounts suggest that the extent to which either their colleagues or their practice teachers had been of assistance to them was associated in some cases with the pressure of work in their placement agencies. The first student quoted above, for example, added to her description of the support provided by her colleagues the comment that she felt lucky to have been placed in an agency where "people had time to talk". A second student made a similar comment:

> Talking to other social workers is amazingly useful. That's the thing about the placement I had, people had time to talk to you about various cases, whereas in the really busy teams people don't have that time.

As this student suggested, other students found that the pressure of work in their placement agencies had prevented them from making use of colleagues as a source of information and support. For example:

> It helped that there were always other people in the office so if you were really stuck you could ask someone else. But there again everyone was always so busy. You're very aware there of the pressure people are under, and I didn't like to interupt and ask things which to them might have seemed silly.

Several students, particularly those who had encountered a caseload management approach to practice teaching, attributed a less than helpful teaching approach to the pressure their teachers themselves were under. Comments such as this tend to support the conclusion drawn by Brodie (1990) that a caseload management approach may be associated with a lack resources and support:

> I wouldn't want you to get the idea I blame him personally. I mean he was carrying a very full caseload himself, none of which were easy cases, if there is such a thing, and on top of that he was responsible for my cases too. So from that point of view he had to make sure he knew what I was doing in all my cases and that meant there wasn't a lot of time for anything else. I would say that was true of the supervision there in general, the supervision he would have been getting himself.

11.3.3. Agency ethos and organisation

The extent to which the students' placement agencies provided a helpful learning milieu also appears to have been associated with agency ethos and organisation. In response to questions about what had helped them in undertaking the work they described three students indicated that a committment to shared learning in the agencies in which they worked had greatly enhanced their own learning experience. As this student put it:

> The approach in the unit wasn't a "we are all so competent we can get on with it approach". It was very much a team approach. People sit down in the team meeting and say I'm having trouble with this issue, how have other people tackled it? The atmosphere's very enabling. It's not a case of if you can't do something you're incompetent. It's a case of if you can't deal with this maybe someone else has had the same problem, so you get the permission to discuss things, and that means you can draw on the expertise in the unit.

In contrast four students singled out an emphasis on displaying competence and coping abilities as having impeded their own learning. For example:

> I found them all very defensive and restrained. They didn't seem to help each other. There was one person I remember saying I've got this case and I don't know what to do about it, and I thought thank God somebody said that, because there seems to be an impression there that you have to know how to do it and that professionalism is the most important thing. ... Meaning keeping up the reputation of the team and being theoretically correct. It's not an atmosphere where you're encouraged to learn. If you can't do it you shouldn't be there, that's the impression.

In some cases a less than helpful learning milieu was associated not with an emphasis on displaying competence, but with an emphasis on the way things were done in a particular agency which left little scope for the students to develop their own ideas. Unsurprisingly perhaps, an emphasis on the way things were done was usually, though not exclusively, associated with area teams where much of the work undertaken was governed by procedural guidelines. In highlighting the restrictions imposed on the development of the students' own ideas by procedural guidelines it is not intended to imply that the provision of these guidelines was in itself unhelpful. On the contrary, several students commented on the support they derived when undertaking statutory work from the provision of clear guidelines, and in any case an ability to "understand accountability and resolve to contain dilemmas between

professional judgement and agency policy" is now a requirement of qualifying students (CCETSW, 1989b, p.20). In some cases, however, the rigid application of procedural guidelines diminished the opportunities available to the students for developing their own ideas. The most striking example of this emerged from the account of one student at the beginning of training rather than from the students' accounts of their placement experiences. Nevertheless it seems legitimate to present an extract from this account as evidence, since the agency concerned also offered placements to students:

> I don't know how typical this is, but where I worked they had a tariff system for juvenile offenders and within that certain recommendations were regarded as higher on the tariff than others. I think the idea was to stop people getting caught up in the system too quickly. So rather than recommending supervision for a first offender, you would recommend the attendance centre, because that was the lowest point on the tariff. Basically that's how I arrived at my recommendation. It was a bit odd, the way it worked though, because it didn't really fit with what I'd written in the report about him being easily led. It's quite well known there that the attendance centre is a bit of a training ground for juvenile offenders, and most of the lads are a lot older than my client was. When it went to court the judge overruled it anyway. He thought going to the attendance centre would be putting him open to the influence of older lads, which is what I thought, but I was told I had to go by the tariff.

None of the students experienced quite this degree of restriction in the course of their education and training, but a variation on the same theme was not uncommon. In almost every case where the students were required to write a formal report for a court or children's panel their practice teachers had encouraged them to model their report on reports which had been compiled by other members of staff. While the students very much appreciated this assistance in a task which they found particularly anxiety provoking, their accounts suggest that the "model" reports to which they had access contained no reference to the social worker's own ideas. In turn they themselves were discouraged from developing their ideas about the situations they described. This extract from one student's account suggests that in some cases approaches to report writing had been governed more by the perceived expectations of other professionals than by the ideas of the social workers concerned:

> The reports I looked at really just covered the material facts. I asked a couple of people actually about that because it wasn't what I'd expected. The general impression seemed to be that the sheriff doesn't want some social worker's ideas, he just wants the facts.

That this approach to report writing was not unique to area teams is illustrated by the experience of a second student who had worked in a residential child care unit:

> I found it quite odd because the assessment report bore very little likeness to all the thinking I'd been doing. ... You know, they're very practical things. I mean the reports differ, different members of staff have different styles, but basically I went on the *type* of thing that everyone else was writing, and *very* rarely was theory explicitly mentioned. It's more just a description of things that had been happening, any incidents, plus what she was saying about what she wanted to happen.

11.3.4. The provision of role models

The accounts of the students who took part in this research tend to support the conclusion drawn by Pithouse (1987), that social work is a peculiarly "invisible" trade. As has been seen, the need for role models to demonstrate ways of working was a recurring theme in their accounts. Only six students, however, described opportunities to watch other people working. These opportunities were highly valued. Moreover, as this extract indicates, the learning which ensued could make a significant contribution to the development of the students' practice:

> Working with elderly people was not something I had experience of so my supervisor arranged for me to "shadow" a member of the elderly team. That was very useful. ... When we went to the day care unit it was really interesting watching the interaction and how he tackled that. It was very illuminating to see that you can actually bring up some quite touchy subjects. ... First of all that it *can* be done, and that there are times that it has to be done, and secondly the importance of explaining why it has to be done. That you don't just sit down and say now I'm going to talk to you about your money. And thirdly the respect for somebody coming at an issue from a different point of view. That although to the worker it seems very clear and the system it's based on seems fair, to the client it doesn't seem fair. So recognising that as a reasonable perception to have. Not imposing what you think but looking at the different strategies open to that person. The way he handled that I thought was excellent. I learnt a lot there that turned out to be very useful in this case.

The accounts of the students who took part in this research suggest, then, that the features of a helpful learning milieu included the provision of a supportive, not unduly pressured environment, a focus on learning, and the availability of

role models. That these factors could contribute to the development of a fluent approach to practice is suggested by the experience of the one student who had been able to develop a fluent approach despite encountering two unhelpful approaches to practice teaching in the course of her education and training. Towards the end of her final placement she described how the learning milieux provided by her second and third placement agencies had contributed to the development of her practice:

> This placement has been superb. It's value has been that it's taught me to organise my thoughts. I think that's partly because I've had quite a lot of cases, so you begin to see patterns, and partly because I've been able to pick up a lot in team meetings. I've moved from being able to see and understand things to being able to *use* that with people. ... The middle placement laid the groundwork really. I didn't do any family work, I did individual work myself, but I watched a lot. My joint supervisors were wonderful. Every time they saw a family the whole team watched, so I got to see a lot of work, and seeing that, and seeing it actually *work*, that has really been helpful with this placement. In this placement I've been able to put into practice what I learnt in the middle placement.

Before moving on to the final chapter of the thesis the main points which have been made here will be summarised.

Summary

In this chapter the part played in the development of the students' practice by their placement experiences has been examined. It has been seen that the practice teaching approaches they encountered appear to have been particularly influential. While approaches which were experienced as therapeutic, unsupportive, constrictive or amorphous appear to have constrained the development of the students' practice, an approach focussed on their own abilities and learning needs appears to have been associated with the development of the skills which were the hallmark of the fluent approach. In some cases, however, factors associated with the students' placement agencies also appear to have played a part in the development of their practice. In particular, the extent to which they felt supported by their colleagues, the extent to which agency ethos encouraged learning, and the provision of opportunities to watch other people working all appear to have played a part in the development of their practice.

Chapter 12
QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND MORE QUESTIONS

Introduction

In the course of reviewing the work of previous researchers in the field of social work education it began to seem that research in this field invariably raises as many questions as it provides answers. Arguably this reflects the extent to which the field is under researched as much as it reflects the limitations of the methods employed. At any rate, this research also raises at least as many questions as it provides answers. The purpose of this chapter is therefore not only to examine the contribution made by the research in relation to the questions which it was hoped to address, but also to outline some of the questions raised which might be addressed by future research. The discussion will focus in turn on each of the three aims which were delineated in Chapter Two. As was seen there, these were to contribute to the development of evaluative methods in the field of social work education, to explore the influence of social work education and training on students' approaches to practice, and to contribute to understanding of the use of theory in social work practice. Although the latter was, to begin with, regarded as somewhat peripheral to the broader aims of the research, it will be apparent that it became very much more central as the research developed, to the extent that the exploration of the influence of social work education and training on students' approaches to practice in fact revolved largely around the use of theory in practice. Accordingly, while the first section of this chapter will focus on the contribution made to the development of evaluative methods, the second section will focus on the contribution made to understanding of the use of theory in practice. The third section will then address the contribution made in relation to the influence of social work education on students' approaches to practice.

12.1. The Development of Methods for The Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Work Education

As was seen in the introduction to the thesis, the aim of contributing to the development of evaluative methods in the field of social work education was central to the funding proposal in which this research originated. In the event the contribution made in this respect is less comprehensive than was originally envisaged, both because the problems of reliability and validity involved precluded the development of an experimental research strategy, and because the qualitative, descriptive strategy which was developed offers no panacea for those problems. Nevertheless the research has, it is suggested, made three contributions to the development of evaluative methods in this educational field.

Firstly, it is hoped that the discussion presented in the earlier chapters of the thesis will stimulate debate about the relative strengths and limitations of different evaluative strategies in this educational field. This is an area which seems scarcely to have been addressed in the literature. In Britain, discussion appears to have focussed exclusively on the related but tangential issues involved in evaluating social work practice and in assessing social work students. The different positions taken by Raynor (1984) and Sheldon (1984) provide an illustration of the former, while a comprehensive exploration of the issues involved in assessing social work students has been undertaken by Hayward (1979). Although both Bloom (1976) and Sowers-Hoag and Thyer (1985) discuss the methodological issues raised by North American evaluative research in the field of social work education, their focus is restricted to the experimental design which dominates North American research in this field.

The predominance of the experimental design in North American evaluative research highlights the second contribution made by this research to the development of evaluative methods in the field of social work education, that is to demonstrate what can be achieved by using qualitative methods. In particular, the research demonstrates that social work students' accounts of their work are a potentially valuable source of information about the knowledge which underpins their approaches to practice. This is not to suggest that experimental methods have no part to play in the evaluation of social work education. On the contrary, it has been seen that they can provide information about what students learn during training which is clearly of interest. It is

suggested, however, that qualitative methods have considerable strengths in relation to the exploration of areas which experimental methods cannot address, including in particular the extent to which students are able to make use of what they have learnt in practice.

The third and perhaps most significant contribution made by this research to the development of methods for the evaluation of social work education consists in the provision of the foundations of a framework within which the development of students' practice, and hence the influence of their education and training, can be understood. It will already be apparent that the typology of approaches to practice described in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight represents only the foundations of such a framework, and some of the outstanding questions which might be addressed by future research will be outlined shortly. First, though, it will be helpful to consider the paradigm within which any future development of the framework would be located.

It might perhaps be assumed that the typology of approaches to practice described in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight represents a first step towards the development of a standardised instrument for the more objective measurement of social work students' performance. To make this assumption would, however, be to assume that the part to be played by qualitative methods in the evaluation of social work education is that of a precursor to the development of other methods. This is certainly the position taken by Sheldon (1984) in relation to the evaluation of social work practice. Qualitative methods, Sheldon argues, represent only a first stage in the development of more rigorous methods. It is essential, he proposes, to translate the findings generated by qualitative methods into predictions the validity of which can be tested by experimental methods. Implicit in this argument, it seems, is the creation of exactly the kind of irony which Garfinkel (1967) warns should be avoided, since to attempt to test the findings of qualitative research by experimental methods is to use the latter to question or corroborate the former. The implications for the development of the typology of approaches to practice described here lie in the fact that the typology is and must remain essentially a heuristic model located within an interpretative, subjectivist paradigm. The reasons why this is so revolve around the fact that the typology is not, and cannot be, context free. Two illustrations can be derived from the material presented in earlier chapters.

Firstly, it will be apparent that the typology is grounded in an attempt to

understand the relationship between social work students' knowledge and what they do in the course of their interactions with the people with whom they work. As has been seen, the fact that students are aware of a range of theoretical explanations for the kind of situations they encounter in practice does not mean that they are able to act in accordance with this knowledge in the course of their interactions with the people with whom they work. In order to arrive at an understanding of the relationship between students' knowledge and what they do in the course of their interactions with the people with whom they work it is therefore necessary to explore and attempt to understand the ways in which that relationship makes sense in the social context to which it is relevant. In turn, the typology of approaches to practice cannot be translated into a standardised performance measure, because to do so would be to set aside the social context in which it is grounded.

The second illustration concerns the nature of the interpersonal and cognitive skills which were described in Chapter Eight as the hallmark of the fluent approach to practice. There appears to be a common tendency, at least within the series of papers published by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work in the course of developing the new Diploma in Social Work, to regard students' skills as objective entities which are acquired during training and which thereafter are something they posess and can deploy in practice. The accounts of the students who took part in this research suggest, however, that the cognitive and interpersonal skills which were the hallmark of the fluent approach cannot be regarded simply as something posessed by the students who were able to deploy them. Rather, the students' ability to deploy these skills depended on a relationship between what they themselves had learnt about ways of approaching social work practice and the educational contexts of their work; that is the extent to which their practice teachers and placement agencies provided the kind of context within which they could develop and pursue their ideas. The significance of the educational contexts of the students work is perhaps most clearly visible in the experiences of the two students who were unable to sustain their fluent approach to practice in the absence of a helpful approach on the part of their practice teachers.

Clearly, this relationship between students' approaches to practice and the educational contexts of their work raises questions about the extent to which qualified practitioners require the same emphasis on learning as students, and these will be considered shortly. Of interest here, however, are the implications

for the future development of the typology of approaches. Just as the relationship between students' knowledge and what they do in the course of their interactions with the people with whom they work cannot be divorced from the social contexts in which that relationship makes sense, so the deployment of the skills associated with the fluent approach cannot be divorced from the educational contexts of students' practice. To attempt to measure the extent to which students have acquired these skills without taking into account the educational contexts of their work would be to obtain only a one dimensional picture of a two dimensional relationship.

Although the typology of approaches to practice cannot, then, be context free, but must remain a heuristic model located within a subjectivist paradigm, it is not intended to imply that it has no relevance beyond the particular contexts explored in the course of this research. On the contrary, the rationale behind the construction of any typology is to offer a more generalised way of understanding social phenomena than can be gained from the exploration of particular, idiosyncratic social contexts. The extent to which the typology described here may be helpful in understanding other contexts is, however, a question for future research. There are a number of ways in which the extent of its usefulness might be assessed, some of which are clearly signposted by the limitations of this research discussed in previous chapters. For example, the extent to which the typology is generalisable to students with different background characteristics entering training by different routes could be assessed by replicating the strategy described here with other students. It may be that this would result in the development of a rather different model, or in the extension of the typology described here. One possibility is that students who are changing career or returning to work in their forties and fifties may well have developed ways of understanding and managing their everyday social lives which differ from those depicted in the accounts of the students who took part in this research. The kind of everyday social approach described in Chapter Six may therefore not be relevant to these students. In turn, older students might respond differently to academic course content, with the result that the kind of fragmented approach described in Chapter Seven may also not be relevant to these students.

Equally, the usefulness of the typology of approaches could be assessed and perhaps extended by obtaining accounts of practice from social work students not only at key stages in their education and training, but also once they are

established in their first qualified posts. Were this to be achieved, it may the case that a fourth approach to practice not encompassed in the typology described here would be identified. The one account of practice obtained in the course of this research which suggested that as experience accrues practitioners may rely less on ready made theoretical generalisations perhaps signposts the beginnings of such a fourth approach. On the other hand, an approach completely outwith the scope of the typology described here may emerge from the relationship between qualified practitioners' knowledge and skills and the contexts in which they are working.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is a clear need for future research to address the question of the extent to which any typology based on students' ability to make use of course content in practice can be regarded as a hierarchy of performance levels. As was suggested in earlier chapters, this might be achieved by combining an analysis of students' accounts of their work with other sources of information. On the basis of the experience of previous researchers, clients' views about the service they have received from students seem likely to prove illuminating in this respect. A recent study described by Baird (1990) suggests, however, that the same care would require to be taken in ascertaining how clients' views make sense in their own context as requires to be taken in interpreting social work students' own accounts. Baird sought to discover whether clients' views might be helpful in assessing students' practice. He notes that in some circumstances, for example where statutory work is concerned, clients may find any student's work unacceptable. Equally, he suggests that some clients may praise any student, whatever the quality of their work.

12.2. The Use of Theory in Social Work Practice

This research has, it is suggested, made a significant contribution to understanding not only of the use in social work practice of the kind of knowledge which is usually described as theoretical, but also of the use of other sources of knowledge. Although this is an area of considerable concern in the field of social work education, it is an area in which very little research has been undertaken. As was seen in Chapter Two, the research which has been undertaken has tended to prescribe in advance how theory should be used in practice. By adopting instead an exploratory, descriptive approach, and

by locating that exploration in the broader context of a more general exploration of students' approaches to practice, this research has, in one sense, been able to break new ground.

On the other hand, as far as the use of theory is concerned, the main conclusion which can be drawn from the information generated by this research, namely that to be of use in practice ready made theoretical explanations have to be adapted, amalgamated and creatively combined with other sources of knowledge, is not a new idea in the field of social work education. As has been seen, both England (1986) and Schon (1987) have suggested as much. That this is the case perhaps lends support to the phenomenological proposition that the theories and constructs generated by research cannot go beyond those available as part of the common stock of knowledge through which members of a society make sense of and depict their social world. This is not to suggest that either research in general or this research in particular has no value. On the contrary, the contribution of this research has been to ground descriptions of the use of theory in practice in empirical research. This, it is suggested, is a helpful contribution in a field where strongly held views about the use of this kind of knowledge tend to be polarised around dichotomous positions, but where evidence to support those views has been lacking.

In addition, the research has been able to extend understanding of the use in social work practice of sources of knowledge other than the sort of knowledge which is usually described as theoretical. Hitherto the other sources of knowledge on which social workers might draw have been described in rather vague terms such as "intuition", "practice wisdom" or "commonsense", perhaps because the focus of most writers has been on the use of theory rather than other sources of knowledge. This research suggests, however, that if a broader approach to the knowledge used in practice is taken it is possible to arrive at a more precise understanding of other sources of knowledge and of their implications for social work practice. The information generated by this research about the part played in the students' approaches to practice by their everyday knowledge about the social world represents, it is suggested, a significant contribution to understanding in this area.

Having suggested that this research has made a significant contribution to understanding of the use of theory and other sources of knowledge in practice,

it is not intended to imply that no further research is required. On the contrary, it has already been suggested that further research might reveal a different relationship between theory and other sources of knowledge were accounts of practice to be obtained from students with different background characteristics. Equally, although it is hoped that this research will provide a useful framework for the analysis of other social work students' accounts of their work, it would clearly also be of considerable interest were some different ways developed of conceptualising the information obtained. As was seen in Chapter Four, the analysis which has been presented here represents only one interpretation of the information obtained in the course of this research, and other interpretations derived from other ways of conceptualising the social world might therefore have much to contribute.

12.3. The Influence of Social Work Education and Training on Students' Approaches to Practice

Within the constraints of a study which explored the experiences of only twenty one students undertaking one social work course this research has, it is suggested, shed some light on the ways in which social work education and training might influence students' approaches to practice. Again, although this is an area of considerable concern in the field of social work education, it is an area which has scarcely been addressed by previous research. While the experimental strategies employed by North American researchers are only capable of generating information about what students have learnt, other studies have focussed largely on students' or qualified practitioners' views on training and have not been designed to explore the influence of training on their work with their clients. There are, however, also limitations to the implications which can be derived from this research for social work education and training because, as has been, it is not possible to assign particular effects to specific causes in the context of this type of exploratory, descriptive study. Accordingly it is not intended to make any generalisations here about changes which might be introduced in social work training. Instead the following discussion will focus on the implications of this study for future research.

The contribution made by this research is probably strongest in relation to the part which might be played by practice teaching in the development of students' practice. As was seen in Chapter Eleven, the experiences of the

students who took part in the research suggest that there may have been an extremely close relationship between the practice teaching approaches they encountered and the development of their practice. If it were to prove generalisable to other contexts, the typology of approaches described here might provide a useful way of exploring this relationship in more detail. For example, it might prove illuminating to use the typology as a yardstick to chart the development of students' practice through one placement, while at the same time obtaining more detailed information than could be obtained in the course of this research about the content and style of their supervision sessions. Were this to be achieved, it might be possible to describe the relationship between practice teaching approaches and the development of students' practice with greater certainty.

This kind of approach might also shed light on an area touched on but not properly addressed by this research; that is the way in which practice teaching approaches are established between teacher and student. In this respect some observation of the interactions between teachers and students, augmented by both parties' accounts of their supervision sessions, might prove illuminating. Although both Brodie (1990) and Gardiner (1987) obtained tape recordings of supervision sessions for the purposes of their research, their focus was respectively on the content of supervision and on identifying teaching and learning styles. Were tape recordings, or preferably video recordings, of supervision sessions to be analysed from the rather different perspective of the ways in which the interaction between student and teacher influences the content of supervision this might yield further information.

In addition to illuminating the part which might be played by practice teaching in the development of students' practice, the research has also broken new ground by providing at least some information about the part which might be played by agency organisation and ethos. Perhaps the main contribution in this respect has been to draw attention to the paucity of information available and to highlight the need for further research. While the information obtained in the course of this research again suggests that students' accounts of their placement work can make a useful contribution in this respect, other methods might also prove illuminating. In particular, the study undertaken by Pithouse (1987) suggests that here too observation of the ways in which agency organisation and ethos impact on students' placement work could augment their own accounts of their experiences.

A third issue relating to both supervision and agency organisation and ethos which requires further research concerns the extent to which students need the same emphasis on learning once they have qualified. As has been seen, the experiences of the students who took part in this research suggest that even in the final stages of training a clear emphasis on learning was required. It seems unrealistic, then, to expect that the acquisition of a qualification would in itself reduce the extent to which an emphasis on learning is required. On the other hand, it also seems unrealistic to propose that the same emphasis should be provided, or indeed is required, throughout a career in social work. The extent of the emphasis on learning required by practitioners at different stages of their careers is therefore an area which future research might usefully explore. A longitudinal study following students into practice along the lines proposed earlier might contribute to understanding in this area.

The question of how the contribution made by this research to understanding of the part played in the development of students' practice by academic teaching might be extended is more problematic. As was seen in Chapter Ten, the research was able to shed some light on the part which might be played by certain aspects of course content and the teaching approaches employed. In other respects, however, the conclusions drawn remain very tentative. The problems involved in obtaining more precise information perhaps stem from the fact that adult learning is in any case a complex field of study, made more complex in a field where concern revolves not only around what students learn but what they are able to do in practice. Given the increasing interest in the field of social work education in innovatory curriculum designs and teaching approaches, one way forward might be to use the typology of approaches described here to compare the influence of two or more courses of education and training, employing different approaches, on the development of students' practice. Although it would be difficult to control for the influence of other variables, and particularly for the influence of the different practice teaching approaches encountered by students, this might provide at least some indication of the relative strengths and limitations of innovatory and more traditional approaches. It might also provide information about the extent to which the typology itself is generalisable to other training contexts.

The need for research to examine the relative strengths and limitations of innovations in the field of social work education highlights one further contribution made by this research. As has been seen, a shift in emphasis in

national training policy has taken place over the past decade away from prescribing course content towards defining educational objectives in terms of the competencies required of qualifying students. This shift in emphasis draws attention to the existence of a "black box" in the field of social work education; that is an area of almost uncharted territory between input, in this case course content, and output, in this case the competencies required of qualifying students. Unless greater attention is paid to the question of how students can be helped to develop the knowledge and skills required for practice, it is difficult to see how the introduction of the new training pattern leading to the Diploma in Social Work will itself improve the quality of students' practice. This problem is compounded by the problems involved in evaluating the impact of the new training pattern, given the fact that very little is known about the influence of previous training patterns on students' approaches to practice. In this respect this research represents only a drop in a very large ocean. Nevertheless, by exploring the influence on students' approaches to practice of one course leading to the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work which is being phased out, the research provides at least some information against which the influence of courses leading to the new Diploma might be compared.

In summary, then, the research which has been described in this thesis has both contributed to understanding in a field which is under resarched, and highlighted some areas which might be addressed by future research. It has also demonstrated what can be achieved by using an exploratory, descriptive research strategy. This kind of strategy is, however, both time consuming and labour intensive, a fact which raises the question of how social work educators can develop and make use of such a strategy to the extent required given the pressures under which they already appear to be working. While some of these pressures have been described in Chapter One, Richards (1985) provides further evidence based on a survey of social work teachers' views. This survey revealed no fewer than ten sources of role strain which, taken together, constitute a considerable amount of pressure. It seems rather unrealistic to add to this pressure the need to develop and make use of time consuming methods of evaluation.

The solution to this problem clearly lies outwith the scope of this thesis, but it seems legitimate, in conclusion, to at least speculate about possibilities. One possibility which increasingly appeals to me is that of establishing specialist research units to which both social work educators and practitioners could be

seconded. This would have two advantages. Firstly, it would create a link between social work education, research and practice the absence of which has been highlighted by a number of writers. Secondly, it would allow research of the type described here to be undertaken by teams of researchers rather than by individuals. As I have struggled to make sense of the almost overwhelming amount of information generated by this research I have thought with envy of projects such as those described by Becker at al. (1977) and by Oleson and Whittaker (1968), which employed teams of researchers to explore the processes of medical and nurse training. Not only would a team approach enable the work involved to be shared. It would also, I think, make for a flexibility and creativity which it is hard to maintain as a lone researcher. At present, however, ideas of this kind are purely speculative. What is more certain is that a great deal more systematic research than has hitherto been undertaken is required in the field of social work education, and that social work educators cannot be expected to undertake this research to the extent to which it is required unless some way is found of freeing them to do so.

I. APPENDIX

I.I. The Interview Schedule

Your paper has given me some understanding of the broad context of your work. What I'd like to do is to explore it in more detail with you to try to understand it better from your point of view. I thought we might start at the very beginning of the work, before you met X for the first time, so that you can describe how the work unfolded.

The beginning of the work

1. Can you describe what information you had to begin with, before you met X for the first time?

2. What impressions did you have at this stage about the sort of issues which might be involved? (Probe re. origin of ideas.)

3. What contributed to your ideas do you think?

4. How did you feel about undertaking the work?

5. What contributed to you feeling that way?

6. *If appropriate* Was there anything which helped you with those feelings before you started the work?

7. How did that help / influence you?

8. Was there anything (else) that with hindsight you think might have helped?

9. What ideas did you have at this stage about how you wanted to approach the work?

10. *If not covered* What were your aims for your first meeting with X?

11. How clear did you feel about the first meeting beforehand?

12. Could you describe your first meeting with X. Did it work out as you wanted?

13. What were *your* preoccupations during the meeting; what was going on in your head?

14. Were there any particular skills or abilities or attributes of your own which you feel contributed to the meeting? (Probe origin)

15. What about eliciting information?/skills?

16. *Adjust for stage of training* Do you think your part in the meeting would have been different before the course?

17. *If appropriate* What do you think has contributed to the difference?

18. How did you feel now about undertaking the work? (Probe difficulties/helpful things)

19. And after the first meeting, how did you make sense of the situation, how did you see it now?

20. What made you think of it that way, and not, say, ...?

21. What do you think contributed to those ideas, apart from the information you'd got itself?

22. What did you turn to when you were trying to understand the situation?

23. With hindsight, is there anything (else) that might have helped your understanding more?

24. *Adjust for stage of training* Do you think before you came on the course you would have had the same ideas about the situation?

25. Was there anything that particularly helped you at this stage that we haven't mentioned?

26. With hindsight, could anything have been of more help?

The Middle of the Work

27. What was your approach to the work then, after the first meeting?

28. What influenced you in your approach?

29. *Adjust for stage of training* Was your approach at this stage different to what it would have been before the course?

30. What were your ideas about the aims of the work now?

31. How did you think that might come about?

32. Could you describe how things went on from there?

33. How clear did you feel about what you were doing?

34. Was there anything that might have helped you to be clearer?

35. What were your own preoccupations at this stage of the work?

36. Was there anything in particular which helped you carry out the work?

37. Could anything have been of more help to you?

38. So at this stage, how did you make sense of the situation? (Probe origin of ideas)

39. What did you turn to in trying to understand the situation?

40. Can you describe *how* you go about making sense of a client's situation?

41. Some students have said that casenotes or other written work was helpful. Was that helpful for you?

42. And with your work during this middle period, were there any particular skills or abilities or attributes of your own which you feel contributed? (Probe re. origin)

43. *Adjust for stage of training* Overall, do you think your meetings with X would have been different before the course?

The End of the Work

Rephrase to fit if not yet ended

44. Could you describe how things ended up?

45. Was that what you had expected?

46. Any skills, abilities, attributes of own contributed? (Probe origin)

47. How did you approach actually ending the work? (Probe re. origin of thinking here)

48. Was your way of dealing with the ending different from before the course?

49. How has the whole experience leave you feeling?

Standard Questions

Rephrase to fit different stages of training

50. Was there any part of the work you found especially dificult? (Probe what made that difficult?)

51. Were there any issues you felt were around but didn't get tackled? (Probe why was that?)

52. Could anything have made it possible to tackle that?

53. Was there any aspect of your work you think was especially successful?

54. Was there anything you thought you could have done better?

55. If you were starting the same case now, would you approach it differently?

56. What strengths in yourself as a social worker do you think this work highlights?

57. Do you think you are different in that respect from before the course? (Probe what has made the difference)

58. What learning needs would you say this work highlights?

59. Can you describe your idea of a good social worker?

60. How do you get to be a good social worker?

61. Where would you say you are in relation to your idea of a good social worker?

62. If you were qualified at end of this year, how would you feel about that?

63. What kind of work do you feel best equipped for? *probe re. statutory work, group work, family work*

64. How helpful do you feel the first year of the course has been in helping you to learn?

65. What about tutorials\relationship with tutor?

66. What about the placement in general? How helpful as that been?

67. *If not covered already* What about supervision\relationship with supervisor?

68. Why did you choose to write about this particular piece of work?

69. How does the amount of reading you did for this case compare with what you did for other cases?

70. Do you think I would have got a different impression of your practice if we'd discussed a different piece of work, or would you say this work was fairly typical?

I.II. Questionnaire

Name:

Age at beginning of training:

Previous degree (subject and level):

Have you previously studied any of these subjects, and if so to what level?

Psychology

Sociology

Social Policy

What paid experience relevant to social work did you have before training?

How long, in total, was this experience?

What other work or voluntary experience did you have before training? (Please indicate the length of any experience)

I.III. Publication

1990: "What Goes on in Students' Placement Work with their Clients? The Influence of Some Contextual Factors on Students' Placement Work", **Issues in Social Work Education** Vol.10 (1 & 2), pp.69-91.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BADGER, Douglas (1985) "Building Bridges - The Transfer of Learning Between Field and Residential Social Work", *In* **Educating Social Workers**, edited by R.J. Harris et al., Leeds, Association of Teachers in Social Work Education.

BAIRD, Peter (1990) "The Proof of the Pudding: A study of Client Views of Student Practice Competence", **Issues in Social Work Education** Vol.10 (1 & 2), pp.24-50.

BARBOUR, Rosaline S. (1984) "Social Work Education: Tackling the Theory-Practice Dilemma", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.14 (6), pp.557-578.

BARR, Hugh (1977) "Puzzled about the CSS? Some answers from the Training Council", **Residential Social Work** Vol.17 (1), pp.15-17.

BASW (1977) **The Social Work Task**, Birmingham, British Association of Social Workers.

BECKER, Howard S. (1971) "Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation", *In* Howard S. Becker, **Sociological Work: Method and Substance**, London, Allen Lane.

BECKER, Howard S., GEER, Blanche, HUGHES, Everett C., and STRAUS, Anselm L. (1977) **Boys in White. Student Culture in Medical School**, New Brunswick, N.J., Transaction Books. (Reprint of the 1961 edition published by the University of Chicago Press).

BENNER, Patricia (1984) **From Novice to Expert. Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice**, Menlo Park, Ca., Addison-Wesley.

BERGER, Peter L. and LUCKMANN, Thomas (1967) **The Social Construction of Reality**, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.

BLOOM, Martin (1976) "Analysis of the Research on Educating Social Work Students", **Journal of Education for Social Work** Vol.12 (3), pp3-10.

BLYTH, M.J. and HUGMAN, B. (1982) "Social Work Education and Probation", *In* **Theory and Practice in Social Work**, edited by Roy Bailey and Phil Lee, Oxford, Blackwell.

BRODIE, Ian James (1990) **Teaching From Practice in Social Work Education: An Analysis of the Content of Supervision Sessions**, M.Phil. Thesis, University of Edinburgh.

BURGESS, Hilary and JACKSON, Sonia, (1990) "Enquiry and Action Learning. A New Approach to Social Work Education", **Social Work Education** Vol.9 (3), pp.1-17.

BUTLER, B. and ELLIOT, D. (1985) **Teaching and Learning for Practice**, Aldershot, Gower.

CAREW, R. (1979) "The Place of Knowledge in Social Work Activity", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.9 (3), pp.349-364.

CARROLL, Donald James (1983) **Predicting Success in Social Work: an exploratory study**, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Maryland.

CCETSW (1983) **Review of Qualifying Training Policies. Report on Responses**, London, Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, Paper 20.

CCETSW (1988) **The Qualifying Diploma in Social Work. Statement of Minimum Requirements of the Social Worker at the Point of Qualification**, London, Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, Paper 20.9.

CCETSW (1989a) **Improving Skills in Practice Teaching. Regulations and Guidance for the Approval of Agencies and the Accreditation and Training of Practice Teachers**, London, Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, Paper 26.3.

CCETSW (1989b) **Requirements and Regulations for the Diploma in Social Work**, London, Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, Paper 30.

CCETSW (1990) **How to Qualify for Social Work**, London, Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, Handbook 9.3.

CICOUREL, Aaron V. (1964) **Method and Measurement in Sociology**, London, The Free Press (Collier Macmillan).

CLARK, Chris L. with ASQUITH, Stewart (1985) **Social Work and Social Philosophy. A Guide For Practice**, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

CLUBOK, M (1978) "Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Helping Skills Training Program", **Journal of Applied Social Sciences** Vol.2 (1), pp.33-41.

CORBY, Brian (1982) "Theory and Practice in Long Term Social Work - a case study of practice with Social Service Department Clients", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.12 (6), pp.619-638.

CORCORAN, K. J. (1982) "Behavioural and Non Behavioural Methods of Developing two Types of Empathy: a comparative study", **Journal of Education for Social Work** Vol.18 (2), pp.85-93.

COULSHED, Veronica (1988) **Social Work Practice. An Introduction**, Basingstoke and London, Macmillan.

COX, R.E. (1982) "The Educational Expectations of Social Work Students", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.12 (4), pp.381-394.

CUMMINS, David E., (1976) "Evaluation Issues", *In* **Competency-Based Education for Social Work**, edited by Morton L. Arkava and E. Clifford Brennan, New York, Council of Social Work Education.

CUNNINGHAM, Catherine V. (1981) "Performance Appraisal Tests for Staff Nurses", **Nursing Times** Vol.77 (16), pp.61-63.

CUNNINGHAM, M. (1982) "Admissions Variables and the Prediction of Success in an Undergraduate Fieldwork Program", **Journal of Education for Social Work**, Vol.18 (2), pp.27-34.

CURNOCK, K. (1985) "Educational Principles and Education for Social Work", *In* **Educating Social Workers**, edited by R.J. Harris et al., Leeds, Association of Teachers in Social Work Education.

CURNOCK, K. and HARDIKER, P. (1979) **Towards Practice Theory. Skills and Methods in Social Assessments**, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

DAVIES, Martin, (1984) "Training: what do we think of it now?" **Social Work Today** Vol.15 (20), pp.12-17.

DAVIES, Martin (1985) **The Essential Social Worker. A Guide to Positive Practice** (Second Edition), Aldershot, Gower.

DENZIN, Norman K. (1978) **The Research Act: a theoretical introduction to sociological methods** (Second Edition), New York and London, McGraw Hill Book Co.

DHSS - Department of Health and Social Security (1978) **Social Service Teams: The Practitioner's View**, (Principle Authors: Olive Stevenson and Phyllida Parsloe), London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

DINGWALL, Robert (1977) **The Social Organisation of Health Visitor Training**, London, Croom Helm.

DOUGLAS, Tom (1989) **Group Work Practice**, London, Tavistock/Routledge.

ENGLAND, Hugh (1986) **Social Work as Art. Making Sense for Good Practice**, London, Allen & Unwin.

EVANS, D. (1985) "An Attempt to Establish a Learning Climate at the Outset of a Teaching Sequence", *In* **Educating Social Workers**, edited by R.J. Harris et al., Leeds, Association of Teachers in Social Work Education.

EVANS, D. (1987) "The Centrality of Practice in Social Work Education", **Issues in Social Work Education** Vol.7 (2), pp.18-101.

EVANS, R. (1976) "Some implications of an Integrated Model of Social Work Theory and Practice", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.6 (2), pp.177-200.

FISCHER, Joel (1975) "Training for effective therapeutic practice", **Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice** Vol.12 (Spring), pp.118-123.

FLANAGAN, J.C. (1954) "The Critical Incident Technique", **Psychological Bulletin** Vol.51 (4), pp.327-338

FORDER, A. and KAY, S., (1973) "Social Work", *In* **Social Policy: A survey of recent developments**, edited by M.H. Cooper, Oxford, Blackwell.

GARDINER, Derek W.G. (1984) "Learning for Transfer", **Issues in Social Work Education** Vol.4 (2), pp.95-105.

GARDINER, Derek W.G. (1987) **Teaching and Learning in Social Work Practice Placements. A Study of Process in Professional Training**, Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, Institute of Education.

GARDINER, Derek W.G. (1988) "Improving Students' Learning - Setting the Agenda for Quality in the 1990s", **Issues in Social Work Education** Vol.8 (1), pp.3-10.

GARFINKEL, Harold (1967) **Studies in Ethnomethodology**, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall.

GIBBS, I. and CIGNO, K. (1986) "Reflections from the field: The Experience of Former CSS and CQSW Students", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.16 (3), pp.289-309.

GIBSON, F., LEWIS, J., LOUGHREY, J. and LOUNT, M. (1981)
"Developments in the teaching of social work skills", **Social Work Education** Vol.1 (1), pp.8–13.

GIDDENS, Anthony (1976) **New Rules of Sociological Method**, London, Hutchinson and Co.

GOFFMAN, Erving (1971) **The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life**, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.

GOULD, Nick (1989) "Reflective Learning for Social Work Practice", **Social Work Education** Vol.8 (2), pp.9–19.

HAINES, John (1985) "Alternative Frameworks for Organising the Social Work Syllabus", *In* **Educating Social Workers**, edited by R.J. Harris et al., Leeds, Association of Teachers in Social Work Education.

HARDIKER, Pauline and BARKER, Mary (1981)
Theories of Practice in Social Work, London, **Academic Press**.

HARRIS, Robert J. (1983) "Social Work Education and the Transfer of Learning", **Issues in Social Work Education** Vol.3 (2), pp.103–117.

HARRIS, Robert J. (1985) "The Transfer of Learning in Social Work Education", *In* **Educating Social Workers**, edited by R.J. Harris et al., Leeds, Association of Teachers in Social Work Education.

HARRISON, David W. (1987) "Reflective Practice in Social Care", **Social Service Review** Vol.61 (3), pp.393–403.

HARRISON, Alen and Harris, Val (1987)
"Accreditation of Practice Teaching", *In* **Accreditation of agencies and practice teachers in social work education. Workshop papers**, London, Central Council for Education and training in Social Work, Supplement to Paper 26.

HARTNOLL, M. (1982) "The Distinctive Nature of the CSS", **Social Work Education** Vol.2 (1), pp.9–11.

HAWTHORNE, Lillian and FLEISHER, Dorothy (1986)
"A New Look at Laboratory Training in First Year Field Education", **Arete** Vol.11 (1), pp.44–53.

HAYWARD, Christine (1979) **A Fair Assessment. Issues in Evaluating Coursework**, London, Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, Study 2.

HMSO (1988) **Community Care: agenda for action: a report to the Secretary of State for Social Services**, (The Griffiths Report), London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

HOWE, David (1987) **An Introduction to Social Work Theory**, Aldershot, Wildwood House.

HOWE, David (1989) **The Consumer's View of Family Therapy**, Aldershot, Gower.

IVEY, Allen (1971) **Microcounseling**, Springfield, Ill., Charles C. Thomas.

JENSON, Alfred C. (1960) "Determining Critical Requirements for Nurses", **Nursing Research** Vol.9 (1), pp.8-11.

JOHNSON, Terry, DANDEKER, Christopher, and ASHWORTH, Clive (1984) **The Structure of Social Theory**, Basingstoke, Macmillan.

JONES, Martyn (1990) "Understanding Social Work: A Matter of Interpretation?", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.20 (3), pp.181-196.

JONES, Mary Ann (1985) **A Second Chance for Families**, New York, Child Welfare League of America.

JORDAN, Bill (1978) "A comment on Theory & Practice in Social Work", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.8 (1), pp.23-25.

JORDAN, Bill (1982) "Generic Training and Specialist Skills" *In* **Theory and Practice in Social Work**, edited by Roy Bailey and Phil Lee, Oxford, Blackwell.

KEEFE, Thomas (1975) "Empathy and Social Work Education: a study", **Journal of Education for Social Work** Vol.11 (3), pp.69-75.

KEEFE, Thomas (1979) "The Development of Empathic Skill: a study", **Journal of Education for Social Work** Vol.15 (2), pp.30-37.

KLEMP, G.O. and McCLELLAND, D.C. (1986) "What characterises intelligent functioning among senior managers?", *In* **Practical Intelligence**, edited by R.J. Sternberg and R.K. Wagner, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

KOPP, Judy & BUTTERFIELD, William (1985) "Changes in Graduate Students' Use of Interviewing Skills from the Classroom to the Field", **Journal of Social Service Research** Vol.9 (1), pp.65-88.

LANDY, Frank J. (1985) **Psychology of Work Behaviour**, Homewood, Ill., The Dorsey Press.

LARSEN, Jo Ann and HEPWORTH, Dean H. (1978) "Skill Development Through Competency-based Education", **Journal of Education for Social Work** Vol.14 (1), pp.73-81

LARSEN, Jo Ann and HEPWORTH, Dean H. (1982)
"Enhancing the Effectivness of Practicum Instruction: An Empirical Study", **Journal of Education for Social Work** Vol.18 (2), pp.50-58.

LEIGHTON, Neil, STALLEY, Richard, and WATSON, David (1982)
Rights and Responsibilities, London, Heineman Educational Books.

LEON, Herman (1970) **Factors Predictive of Successful Educational Performance in Social Work School**, D.S.W. Dissertation, Columbia University.

LEONARD, Peter (1975) "Explanation and Education in Social Work", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.5 (3), pp.325-333.

LISHMAN, Joyce (1988) "Social Work Interviews: How Effective Are They?", **Research Policy and Planning** Vol.5 (2), pp.1-5.

MAYER, J.E. and TIMMS, N. (1970)
The Client Speaks: Working Class Impressions of Casework, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

MELIA, Kath (1987) **Learning and Working. The Occupational Socialisation of Nurses**, London, Tavistock.

MICHAEL, Gillian (1976) **Content and Method in Fieldwork Teaching**, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh.

MILLER, P.McC. and WILSON, M.J. (1983)
A Dictionary of Social Science Method, Chichester, John Wiley and Sons.

NELSON-JONES, Richard (1988)
Practical Counselling and Helping Skills (Second Edition), London, Cassell.

NISW (1982) **Social Workers, their Roles and Tasks**, London, National Institute for Social Work.

OLESON, Virginia L. and Whittaker, Elvi W. (1968)
The Silent Dialogue. A Study in the Social Psychology of Professional Socialization, San Franciso, Jossey-Bass.

PALEY, John (1984) "The Devolution of Social Work Knowledge", **Social Work Education** Vol.3 (2), pp.19-24.

PALEY, John (1987) "Social Work and the Sociology of Knowledge", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.17 (2), pp.169-186.

PARLETT, Malcolm and HAMILTON, David (1972)
Evaluation as Illumination: A new approach to the study of innovatory programs, Edinburgh, Centre for Research in the Educational Sciences, University of Edinburgh.

PATTON, Michael Quinn (1980)
Qualitative Evaluation Methods, Beverly Hills, Ca., Sage Publications.

PATTON, Michael Quinn (1987)
How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation, Beverley Hills, Ca., Sage Publications.

PILALIS, Jennie (1986) "The Integration of Theory and Practice - a re-examination of a paradoxical expectation", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.16 (1), pp.79-96.

PITHOUSE, Andrew (1987) **Social Work: The Social Organisation of an Invisible Trade**, Aldershot, Avebury.

POPPER, K.R. (1963) **Conjectures and Refutations**, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

RAYNOR, Peter (1984) "Evaluation with One Eye Closed: The Empiricist Agenda in Social Work Research", B(British Journal of Social Work) Vol.14 (1), pp.1-10.

REAY, R. (1986) "Bridging the Gap: a model for integrating theory and practice", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.16 (1), pp.49-64.

REES, Stuart and WALLACE, Alison (1982)
Verdicts on Social Work, London, Edward Arnold.

REIN, M. and WHITE, S.H. (1981)
"Knowledge for Practice", **Social Service Review** Vol.55 (1), pp.1-41.

RICHARDS, Margaret (1985) "In Defence of Social Work Teachers", *In* **Educating Social Workers**, edited by R.J. Harris et al., Leeds, Association of Teachers in Social Work Education.

RICHARDSON, Stephen A., DOHRENWEND, Barbara S., and KLEIN, David (1965)
Interviewing: Its Forms and Functions, New York, Basic Books.

ROSENBLATT, A. and MAYER, J.E. (1975)
"Objectionable Supervisory Styles: Students' Views", **Social Work (U.S.A.)** Vol.20 (3), pp.184-189.

SAINSBURY, E. (1982) "Knowledge Skills and Values in Social Work Education", *In* **Theory and Practice in Social Work**, edited by Roy Bailey and Phil Lee, Oxford, Blackwell.

SAINSBURY, E., NIXON, S. and PHILLIP, D. (1982)
Social Work in Focus. Clients' and Social Workers' Perceptions in Long-Term Social Work, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

SCHINKE, S.P., SMITH, T.E., GILCHRIST, L.D., and WONG, S. (1978)
"Interviewing Skills Training: An Empirical Evaluation", **Journal of Social Service Research** Vol.1 (4), pp.391-401.

SCHINKE, S.P., BLYTHE, B.J., GILCHRIST, L.D. and SMITH, T.E. (1980)
"Developing Intake Interviewing Skills", **Social Work Research and Abstracts**, Vol.16 (4), pp.29-34.

SCHON, Donald (1983) **The Reflective Practitioner**, London, Maurice Temple Smith Ltd.

SCHON, Donald (1987) **Educating the Reflective Practitioner**, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

SCHUTZ, Alfred (1972) **The Phenomenology of The Social World**, edited by Helmut R. Wagner, London, Heinemann.

SECKER, J. and Clark, C. (1990)
A Bibliography of Relevant Research in Social Work Education, Research Issues in Social Work Education and Training No.2, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh.

SHAPIRO, Constance H., MUELLER-LAZAR, Jeanne, and WITKIN, Stanley L. (1980)
"Performance-based Evaluation: A diagnostic Tool for Educators", **Social Service Review** Vol.54 (2), pp.262-272.

SHELDON, Brian (1978) "Theory and Practice in Social Work - a re-examination of a tenous relationship", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.8 (1), pp.1-21.

SHELDON, Brian (1984) "Evaluation with one eye closed: the Empiricist agenda in social work research - A Reply to Peter Raynor", **British Journal of Social Work** Vol.14 (6), pp.635-637.

SILVERMAN, David (1985) **Qualitative Methodology and Sociology**, Aldershot, Gower.

SMITH, M.J. (1962) **Professional Education for Social Work in Britain. An Historical Account**, London, George Allen & Unwin.

SOWERS-HOAG, Karen and THYER, Bruce (1985)
"Teaching Social Work Practice: A Review and Analysis of Empirical Research", **Journal of Education for Social Work** Vol.21 (3), pp.5-15.

STEIN, Shayna, LINN, Margaret W. and FURDON, James (1974)
"Predicting Social Work Student Performance", **Journal of Education for Social Work** Vol.10 (3), pp.85-92.

STONE, Mike (1985) "The Induction of Students on Social Work Courses", *In* **Educating Social Workers**, edited by R.J. Harris et al., Leeds, Association of Teachers in Social Work Education.

SUDMAN, Seymour and BRADBURN, Norman M. (1982)
Asking Questions. A Practical Guide to Questionnaire Design, San Francisco and London, Jossey-Bass.

SVENSSON, L. (1976) **Study Skill and Learning**, Goteborg, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

SYSON, L. and BAGINSKY, M. (1981)
Learning to Practise: a study of practice placements in courses leading to the CQSW, London, Central Council for Education and training in Social Work, Study 3.

THOMAS, Neil (1988) "Evaluative Research and The Personal Social Services", *In* **Evaluation: Research Highlights in Social Work 8** (Second Edition), London, Jessica Kingsley.

TORRE, Elizabeth (1974) "Student Performance in Solving Social Work Problems and Work Experience Prior to Entering the MSW Programme", **Journal of Education for Social Work** Vol.10 (2), pp.114-117.

TOSELAND, R. and SPIELBERG, G. (1982)
"The Development of Helping Skills in Undergraduate Social Work Education: model and evaluation", **Journal of Education for Social Work** Vol.18 (1), pp.66-73.

TRUAX, C.B. and CARKHUFF, R.R. (1967)
Towards Effective Counselling and Psychotherapy, Chicago, Aldine.

TYLER, Ralph W. (1944) **Basic Principles of Curriculum & Instruction**, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

WATERHOUSE, Lorraine (1987)
"The Relationship between Theory and Practice in Social Work Training", **Issues in Social Work Education** Vol.7 (1), pp.3-19.

WILKES, Ruth (1981) **Social Work with Undervalued Groups**, London, Tavistock.

WRIGHT, Peter G. (1985) "The impact of training on students' values", **Social Work Education** Vol.4 (2), pp.9–11.

YOUNGHUSBAND, Eileen, L. (1947)
Report on the Employment and Training of Social Workers, Edinburgh, T. and A. Constable.

YOUNGHUSBAND, Eileen, L. (1978)
Social Work in Britain 1950–1975 Vol.2, London, George Allen and Unwin.